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# HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS



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TO  
VISCOUNT ASTOR

*My dear Waldorf—*

*You once did me the honour of naming a racehorse after me, the fame of whom has gone abroad in the earth. May I, as an inadequate return, and in token of a long friendship, inscribe your name on this book?*

*J. B.*

*June 1926.*

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I

SIR WALTER SCOTT

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SIR WALTER SCOTT<sup>1</sup>

IN THE SPRING OF 1917 I WAS COMPELLED, FOR reasons not unconnected with public affairs, to spend a considerable time in bed, and, in the pleasant idle weeks of convalescence, I amused myself with carrying out a plan which I had long contemplated. I had been in the habit of reading some of the Waverley Novels every year, but on this occasion I re-read carefully what I considered the best—*Waverley*, *Old Mortality*, *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Rob Roy*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, and *Redgauntlet*. Then I read my favourites among the voluminous works of Alexandre Dumas, the Valois and D'Artagnan cycles; then Victor Hugo's *Nôtre Dame* and *Les Misérables*; and I concluded with half a dozen of Balzac. After that I tried to marshal my thoughts, and one very clear conviction stood out in my mind. Obviously each of those four masters of fiction had special qualities in which he excelled the others; Dumas in glitter and speed, Victor Hugo in an imaginative intensity akin to poetry, Balzac in his disentangling of the web of human society. But I had a clear conviction that Scott was the greatest; he left upon me more than the others the impression which the great classical writers leave, of seeing things on a grander scale, of clarifying life, of observing

<sup>1</sup> A paper read to the English Association, October 26, 1923.

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justly and interpreting nobly, of possessing that "stellar and undiminishable something" which was Emerson's definition of greatness. I am in many ways abundantly prejudiced, and as a fellow-Borderer I am altogether prejudiced in favour of Sir Walter the man; but I hope I am willing to judge Sir Walter the writer with an impartial mind. So for what it is worth I present you with this conclusion.

Others have thought the same, but not many have attempted a reasoned justification of their preference. I could wish that some of our younger scholars would turn their admirable critical talent to the prose of Sir Walter Scott. He has been far too much taken for granted, as if he were a statue in a public place. I well understand that to a modern critic there may be more engaging topics than a reputed classic, and that he may prefer to study writers who have a definite effect of attraction or repulsion upon contemporary work. But after all a critic can only show his true mettle in dealing with masterpieces, and when they have said their say about Shakespeare I would like to see them turning to Scott. I believe that criticism to-day in this country is in a healthy state, for it eschews both anarchy and formalism and labours to find a just canon. I believe that with such a critical mood Scott would fare well, and that at his best he will stand the test of the most searching examination and the most austere standards.

It is curious how rarely he has been made the subject of serious criticism. His encomiasts have been eloquent and sincere like Ruskin, his detractors have been boisterous and bitter like George Borrow, but he has been praised and



blamed in a spirit of rhetoric rather than of science. The really penetrating criticism of Scott could be collected in a very slim volume. The best is perhaps his own, or Lockhart's; or his friend Lady Louisa Stuart's; admirable, too, is that of a contemporary, J. L. Adolphus, whose *Letters to Richard Heber on the Waverley Novels*, published by Mr. Murray in 1821, deserve to be better known. Walter Bagehot wrote of him with his customary acumen and strong good sense; but for the rest—with rare exceptions—we have only warm appreciations by writers who are too much in love with the man to look judicially upon his work, or essays in belittlement by adherents of some minor coterie. An exception is the late A. W. Verrall—*clarum et venerabile nomen*—whose study of Scott's prosé style is a model of what I mean by impartial and penetrating criticism—such criticism as Shakespeare has had for a hundred years. I want to see Dr. Verrall's method applied to all the aspects of Scott's genius, for only thus can justice be done to him.

This short paper is not an attempt to meet that need. I have no claim to speak with authority as a critic. I propose only to consider one or two of the more serious charges which have been advanced against the *Waverley Novels*, and to offer one or two pleas in defence. I will take criticisms which go to the heart of the matter—which, if admitted, must make us question Scott's right to a place in the highest rank of letters. The three I have selected are the charge against his verbal style, the charge against the form and construction of the tales, and the complaint of a lack of the quality which the Greeks called *σπουδαίον*—

of a shallow and conventional conception of human life. I offer my remarks in the hope that some among you, who are better equipped than myself, may be induced to take the matter further.

## I

The complaint as to his style needs to be exactly stated. Obviously we cannot expect to find in him anything esoteric in the use of words, any delicate exercises in verbal dry-point, any of what Professor Elton has called "those false associations of painful, choice, and fastidious language that have gathered for half a century round the word *art*." I do not say that these refinements have not their beauty and value in their proper place, when the subject admits of them—in Sir Thomas Browne, in Charles Lamb, in Walter Pater, in some of the essays of Stevenson. But in Scott's type of work they are manifestly out of keeping. There is a passage in his *Journal*, written in 1826, where he makes a revealing confession. "I am sensible, that if there be anything good about my poetry or my prose either, it is a hurried frankness of composition, which pleases soldiers, sailors, and young people of bold and active disposition. I have been no sigher in shades." Had Scott indulged in the *finesse* of language he would have been guilty of a grave fault of craftsmanship, and the result would have been as preposterous as the insertion of point lace in a buff coat. Any complaint on this score may be discarded as irrelevant, and left to that not very important class whom Stevenson has described as "the young gentlemen who cant



about Art." I find it impossible to dissociate style from matter, and to admire a form which is not an organic part of the substance. Mere juggling with words for their own sake seems to me a foolish trifling, and I do not understand a manner of saying something which has merit independent of the thing said. I have heard of a short-sighted and somewhat affected lady who one day at a Scottish railway station ran up to a porter and wailed, "What *am* I to do? I have lost all my luggage and I cannot find a porter." The man regarded her gravely and replied: "Twa verra serious losses. But if ye've lost all your luggage, ye'll no need a porter." We can apply the moral. What use is a porter to those who have no luggage?

The real charge is a more serious affair. It is that Scott, from carelessness or ineptitude in the use of words, spoiled the artistic effect of his narrative; that his tools were so blunt and cumbersome that they often fail to do their work; that his extreme facility kept him always on the edge, and sometimes led him over the edge, of banality; and that he attains his great moments by a kind of happy accident in defiance of his style. The charge has been made by Stevenson, an admirer and follower, in his "Gossip on Romance," and it has been made in uncompromising terms. "His characters . . . will be wading forward with an ungrammatical and undramatic rigmarole of words." . . . "He could . . . often fob us off with languid, inarticulate twaddle." . . . "He conjured up the romantic with delight, but he had hardly patience to describe it." . . . "He was a great day-dreamer . . . but hardly a great artist;

hardly, in the manful sense, an artist at all."

That is a solemn bill of attainder, but is it just? Well, in the first place I cannot agree with the critic about the example he selects in justification of his charge. It is the famous "recognition" scene in *Guy Mannering*, when Harry Bertram lands at Ellangowan and hears the tune on the flageolet. It is true that it contains a sentence somewhat clumsily interpolated, but the romantic pitch is so high, the drama so intense, that to me, at least, the clumsiness seems negligible. But I do not wish to found on one instance, and I am prepared to make concessions to the critics. Scott is sometimes ungrammatical, as the faithful Lockhart was never tired of telling him. He is sometimes so careless that one sentence trips on the heels of another. He could fall into that jargon which in his time was believed to be polite English, and speak of "the superb monarch of the feathered tribes," when he meant an eagle, and allow Helen Macgregor in *Rob Roy* and Norna in *The Pirate* to talk like a governess from Miss Pinkerton's Academy, and—unpardonable crime—make the adorable Di Vernon thus address Rashleigh Osbaldistone: "Dismiss from your company the false archimage, Dissimulation, and it will better ensure your free access to our classical consultations." Let us grant that he could write abominably. But is there any great writer, especially any great novelist, who does not sometimes nod? Dickens has appalling lapses of style; so has Thackeray; so has George Meredith, though his habit of twisted language often disguises their feebleness.

The truth is that any man whose business it is



to portray life in action and who is caught up in the white heat of his task, is certain at times to seize the first phrase which comes to his hand, and jar on his more fastidious readers. Scott in his careless moments fell into the fault of "polite English," but was it worse than the desiccated quasi-scientific phrases which disfigure the work of even our best to-day? Was it a worse cloak for laziness and slackness of thought than, say, the chatter of psycho-analysis, with its "complexes" and "reactions" and "inhibitions"? Does it jar more than the pompous inanities of philosophy which intrude into other men's prose? I will give you one example from a very great modern. To my mind the most beautiful passage written in our day by any novelist is the last two paragraphs of Mr. Hardy's *Woodlanders*. It is so beautiful that I am almost ashamed to pick a hole in it. You remember how it goes: "As this solitary and silent girl stood there in the moonlight, a straight slim figure, clothed in a plaitless gown, the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible in her, the marks of poverty and toil effaced by the misty hour, she touched sublimity at points." Could anything be better? But it goes on: "and looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism." Could anything be much worse? It sounds like a sentence from an oration delivered over some deceased Positivist.

This, I grant, is only a plea in extenuation. But I submit further that Scott was a very great artist in words, playing with them as a musician plays with the notes of music, and weaving har-



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monies as subtle and moving as you will find in the whole range of English prose. On a certain level his gifts are admitted by all. He was a master of easy, swift, interesting narrative; he was a master of dialogue, especially that of humble folk; he invented a mode of speech for the figures of past ages, which is at once romantic and natural. But on the highest levels, where alone he is to be judged, he is more wonderful still. When the drama quickens and the stage darkens he attains to a style as perfect and unforgettable as Shakespeare's, and it is most subtly compounded. Dr. Verrall has analysed the speech of Meg Merrilees to the laird of Ellangowan, and has shown with what extraordinary cunning and justice the soft vowels and the harsh consonants are used, how repetition is artfully employed to enhance the majesty of the indictment, how each particular object mentioned, each adjective, plays its part in the total impression. Professor Elton has done the same thing with Claverhouse's speech to Morton in *Old Mortality*. That is the kind of criticism of Scott's style which is worth making—careful, patient, imaginative analysis such as we give to a chorus of Æschylus, and his work is great enough to justify it. The method might well be applied to the closing scene of *Redgauntlet*, or the last chapters of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, and above all to "Wandering Willie's Tale," in which hardly a word fails of its exact adequate effect. If it be urged that this was done by instinct, not by conscious art, I reply that I do not care. Scott wrote hurriedly, and so did Shakespeare; the divine fire was there and we are not concerned with how it was lit.

One other word in this connection. Scott, as he said, was no sigher in shades, and there are certain qualities of style which we do not look for in romances of active bustling life. But now and then comes another mood, when the sense of the transience of things steals over him and touches his prose with a strange wistfulness, as if the strong and self-contained soul at last found utterance. You will find the mood occasionally in his novels, but it is in every page of the *Journal*. There you have the tenderness which keeps watch over man's mortality and neither quails nor complains—a language as universal as the Gospel of St. John. Whatever of his work may be forgotten, the *Journal* will surely remain to comfort the weary and the sorely tried.

## II

The second charge is more important, and touches the ordering and shaping of his tales, their alleged lack of proportion, their often huddled and hasty conclusions. Here again it is necessary to make frank admissions. Scott's habit was to take a great mass of life and show it in all its infinite variety. He did not write with a thesis, and therefore he is loath to discard what interests him, even if its relevance is not very clear. His affections were so actively engaged with his characters and their doings that he is apt to linger with them in side-walks. The architecture of his novels is certainly not their strong point. Only *Old Mortality* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*, I think, are really well constructed; and, of course, the



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short stories like "Wandering Willie's Tale" and "The Two Drovers." I admit that *Waverley* is disjointed, that *The Heart of Midlothian* ends anyhow, that he allowed the plot of *St. Ronan's Well*, a fine tragic theme, to be mauled by the prudery of his publisher.

But there are two things to remember. One is that, when he began to write, the tradition of the novel was picaresque, a rambling, often inconsequent, adventure, not adapted for the exposition of a single *motif*. The second is that, while a novel as a whole may be badly arranged, the main episodes are almost always perfectly managed. When we judge Scott's architecture I think that we should consider rather the main drama, which is not always coterminous with the whole story. If we take that as the unit we shall find little to complain of. The essence of *The Heart of Midlothian* is the self-sacrificing sisterly love of Jeanie Deans, and the record of that has no flaw in it; of *Redgauntlet*, the tragic irony of a forlorn loyalty surviving into world of prose; and could there be a more perfect culmination than when on the Solway shore a Campbell speaks the noble and chivalrous epitaph of Jacobitism? There may be padding and fumbling in the minor episodes, but the great dramatic moment arrives and Scott rises to it with the ease and certainty of genius. The list is endless—Fergus MacIvor passing to death under the archway; Caleb Balderstone, picking up the Master's feather and placing it in his bosom; the end of Sergeant Bothwell; Morton's flight from Burley; the recognition scene in *Guy Mannering*; the scene between Elizabeth and Leicester in the grotto at Kenilworth; the meeting of Jeanie Deans

and Queen Caroline; the sudden martial ardour of Bailie Nicol Jarvie at the Clachan of Abertoyle; the gathering in Neil Blane's public-house at the beginning of *Old Mortality*; the whole episode of Elspeth of the Craighburnfoot in *The Antiquary*. These things are great drama, for they proceed from the clash of character, but they are also epic, for they show the conflicts of history sublimated and focussed by a triumphant imagination, and they stir the blood like wine and trumpets.

I will take one last illustration from what seems to me to be on the whole one of the lesser novels, *Ivanhoe*—the scene at the tournament at Ashby, when Locksley is shooting at the butts. Up till then it has all been excellent vivid narrative—the jousting and the archery, the pleasantries of Wamba, the jealousy of Saxon and Norman; and then suddenly comes something different.—“And now,” said Locksley, “I will crave your Grace's permission to plant such a mark as is used in the North Country.” What has happened? The horns of Elfland are blowing. What we have had before has been the good stock machinery of romance, but now the horizon is suddenly enlarged to embrace the greenwood, and Old England is summoned to the rescue. Can we wonder that such a note should appeal to youth? Scott judged his audience rightly, and in that lies one secret of his permanence, for the literature of the middle-aged has its modes and changes, but the fashion of youth is eternal.

In connection with this question of construction let us glance at a complaint often made against the novels—their *longueurs* and excessive padding, and the flat monotony of most of the heroes



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and heroines. We have Scott's own defence of his padding in his view of Miss Austen.

"Let anyone cut out from the *Iliad* or from Shakespeare's plays everything . . . which is absolutely devoid of importance or interest *in itself*; and he will find that what is left will have lost more than half its charms. We are convinced that some writers have diminished the effect of their works by being scrupulous to admit nothing into them which had not some absolute, intrinsic, and independent merit. They have acted like those who strip off the leaves of a fruit-tree, as being of themselves good for nothing, with the view of securing more nourishment to the fruit, which in fact cannot attain its full maturity and flower without them."

It sounds as if there might be reason in that. His padding, antiquarian and otherwise, is intended as a relief, to provide a rest for the mind in the midst of exciting action. Something of the same kind may be said about his stockish heroes and heroines. They are passive people for the most part, creatures of the average world, not majestic men and women of destiny. But they are not unreal; the earth is full of them; they are all the more natural for being undistinguished. They seem to me on the whole to play a very vital and artistic part, for there is such a thing as having too stimulating fare. They form a solid background, a kind of Greek chorus, repeating all the accepted platitudes, and keeping the drama, which might otherwise become fantastic, within reach of our prosaic life.

The point is worth developing further, for it is bound up with the meaning of romance. It is one of Scott's characteristics that, though sympathiz-

ing in every fibre with the coloured side of life, with men's exaltations and agonies, he feels bound to let common sense put in its word now and then, to let the voice be heard of the normal, pedestrian world. Coventry Patmore in his *Principle in Art* has pointed out that in a great painting there is always some prosaic object which provides a point of rest for the eye, and without which the whole value of the picture would be altered. This duty is performed in literature by the ordinary man, by Kent in *Lear*, by Horatio in *Hamlet*, by Banquo in *Macbeth*—they are, so to speak, the "eye" of the storm which rages about them, and serve to measure the departure of the others from sanity, moderation, virtue, or merely normal conduct. "Each of these characters," he says, "is a peaceful focus radiating the calm of moral solution throughout all the difficulties and disasters of surrounding fate; a vital centre, which, like that of a great wheel, has little motion in itself, but which at once transmits and controls the fierce revolution of the circumference." Mr. Patmore calls this point of rest the *Punctum indifferens*; it has also been called the *Punctum immobile*; it is the quiet anchorage of good sense from which we are able to watch with a balanced mind the storm without. I am inclined to think that no great art is without it, and that the absence of it prevents certain writers such as Dostoievski from being in the highest class. Scott never loses his head; he never forgets the "main march of the human affections"; and the artistic value is as undeniable as the moral value. The fantastic, the supernatural, the quixotic are heightened in their effect by being shown against this quiet background;



moreover, they are made credible by being thus linked to our ordinary world. Behind all the extravagance we hear a voice like Dr. Johnson's, reminding us that somewhere order reigns, that Prometheus may be a fine fellow, but that Zeus is still king of gods and men. Compare Scott with Victor Hugo and you will understand the difference which the lack of this quality makes. In the great Frenchman there is no slackening of the rein, no lowering of the top-note, till the steed faints from exhaustion and the strident voice ceases to impress our dulled ears.

This quality in Scott's work is closely related to a characteristic of the man which is perhaps best described as common sense—the sense of the commonalty. He is always of the centre, walking on the broad main road of humanity, keeping, in the immortal words of Davie Deans, “the middle and straight path, on the ridge of a hill where wind and water shears, avoiding right-hand snares and extremes and left-hand way-slidings, like Johnny Dodds of Farthings Acre, and ae man mair that shall be nameless.” An episode in his career, one of the best-known episodes in the history of literature, illustrates the character of the man. Scott, you remember, woke up one morning at the close of 1825, when he was fifty-four years of age, to find himself ruined—saddled with an enormous burden of debt, for the most part the result of his own carelessness and grandiose ambitions. He refused to seek the refuge of bankruptcy; he set himself to pay off his creditors in full; for the rest of his days he toiled unceasingly at the task; he succeeded, but he died of it. To you and me that seems a noble and splendid

action, not quixotic or fantastic, but simply the carrying out faithfully of the highest standards of plain human honour.

Now listen to Thomas Carlyle on the subject: "It was a hard trial. He met it proudly, bravely—like a brave, proud man of the world. Perhaps there had been a prouder way still; to have owned honestly that he *was* unsuccessful then, all bankrupt, broken, in the world's good and repute; and to have turned elsewhere for some refuge. Refuge did lie elsewhere; but it was not Scott's course or fashion of mind to seek it there."

These words were written, it is true, before Scott's *Journal* was published and the spiritual history of those tragic years given to the world. But, as they stand, what do they mean? No doubt such a renunciation and retirement would have been what is called in the jargon of to-day, a striking "gesture," and we can imagine the eulogies which later sentimentalists would have expended on this *gran rifiuto*. But it would have meant that his creditors would not have been paid, that innocent people would have suffered for the consequences of his own folly. I am the last man to underrate Thomas Carlyle, but of all great Scotsmen he was the one who lived most exclusively in the world of books. He praised the man of action, but his own days were spent in a library, and he was curiously remote from the rough-and-tumble of life. The course he would have had Scott follow would have been picturesque from a literary standpoint, but it would have been a shirking of a plain duty and repugnant to Sir Walter's manly good sense. He had made a blunder, and his business was to atone for it; had



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he robed himself in his literary mantle and retired to a shieling among the hills to meditate on the transience of human glory, there would have been no atonement.

That is an extreme instance of the fundamental quality of his character which I have called common sense. It is a mistake, I think, to assume that he had any snobbish contempt for the profession of letters; his whole life showed that he held it in the highest esteem, and he gave to it the best interests and powers of his mind. But he saw that an art is degraded if its practitioners demand privileges in matters of conduct beyond other men. He himself had no vanity or peevishness. He thought that most of his contemporaries wrote better than he did, and that the simplest soldier who carried a gun for his country was a sounder fellow than he was. He refused to indulge in false heroics about his craft or to think that the possession of great gifts released him from the humblest human obligation. He could not see that rules of morality which held in the case of the soldier, the merchant, and the country labourer should be slackened for the artist, or that an imaginative temperament and a creative mind gave a plenary indulgence to transgress. He ranked himself with the plain man, and because he ranked himself with him he understood him.

A consequence of this quality is Scott's skill in cunning anti-climax, which, like the "falling close" in a lyric, does not weaken but increases the effect. Like the Gifted Gilfillan in *Waverley*, he can pass easily and naturally from the New Jerusalem of the Saints to the price of beasts at Mauchline Fair. The gravedigger Mortsheugh in

*The Bride of Lammermoor* has his petty grumble amid the shadows of high tragedy: Mause Headrigg, caught up in religious ecstasy, begs her son not to "sully the marriage garment," and Cuddie replies: "Awa, awa, Mither, never fear me . . . ye're bleezing awa about marriage, and the job is how we are to win by hanging;" Alick Polwarth, after the fine tragic scene of Fergus MacIvor's death, brings us to earth with information about which gate his head will be fixed on; and old Haagen in *The Pirate* dashes Minna's sentiment about Montrose by expounding with inexorable logic the superior wisdom of running away. It is a breaking in upon romance of a voice from the common world; it does not weaken the heroic, it brings it home.

I am willing to go further and argue that, without some such salt of the pedestrian, romance becomes only a fairy tale and tragedy a high-heeled strutting. The kernel of romance is contrast, beauty and valour flowering in unlikely places, the heavenly rubbing shoulders with the earthly. The true romantic is not the Byronic hero; he is the British soldier whose idea of a *beau geste* is to dribble a football into the enemy's trenches; he is some such type as the Georgian sea-captains who wore woollen underclothing, and loved food and wine and the solid comforts of the hearth when they were not about their business of fighting; or some warrior like old Sir Andrew Agnew at the battle of Dettingen, who thus exhorted his regiment: "My lads, ye see these loons on yon hill there; weel, if ye dinna kill them, they'll kill you." All romance, all tragedy, must be within hailing distance of our humdrum lives,



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and anti-climax is a necessary adjunct to climax. You will find it in the Ballads—this startling note of common sense linking fact and dream. You will find it in Shakespeare, who can make Cleopatra pass from banter with a peasant to the loftiest of human soliloquies—"Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there? . . . Those that do die of it do seldom or never recover . . . I wish you joy o' the worm." And then:

"Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have  
Immortal longings in me."

You will find it in Scott, whose broad sane vision saw that tragedy and comedy are sisters, and that, like Antæus, neither can live without the touch of her mother, the earth.

### III

I come now to the most serious charge of all. There are two counts in it, though they are linked together, for they imply the absence of the same quality. The first count is that Scott's delineation of character is purely external and that he has no deep insight into human souls. Hazlitt suggests it when he finds him lacking in "what the heart whispers to itself in secret"; Carlyle states it flatly: "Your Shakespeare fashions his characters from the heart outwards: your Scott fashions them from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them;" Walter Bagehot puts it precisely after his fashion, when he finds Scott weak in his treatment of love and of religion. The second count is that he lacked high seriousness,

## SIR WALTER SCOTT

a profound vision of life; that he is without the moments which

“tease us out of thought,  
As doth eternity.”

“We have mind, manners, animation,” says Bagehot, “but it is the stir of this world. We miss the consecrating power.” And Carlyle shakes the disapproving head of a fellow Scot, who would fain revere but can only admire. “Not profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for edification, for building up or elevating in any shape! The sick heart will find no healing here, the darkly struggling heart no guidance; the Heroic that is in all men no divine awakening voice.”

It is a grave charge, so grave that if it were substantiated it would exclude Scott from the inner circle of greatness and relegate him to the populous borderland of mere skilful entertainers, for the “stellar and undiminishable something” would be lacking. Before we examine it let us try to set down what were Scott’s limitations. Bagehot, I think, is right in the main in his strictures, though I dissent from his general conclusion. Scott’s world was a very large and rich one, larger and richer perhaps than that of any other novelist, but it had its boundaries. It was a world in which things worked out normally by some law of averages, where goodness was on the whole rewarded and evil punished, a friendly universe not at war with human aspirations. It was above all a healthy world, founded on common sense and honest sentiment. It was not grievously perturbed with thought. Hence we do not find in it figures of profound intellectual or moral subtlety. I will



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go further and say that I do not believe that Scott could have portrayed that type; he could picture a Hotspur or a Henry V, but not a Hamlet. Such an historical figure, for example, as Montrose, could not have been drawn in detail on his canvas; for what Bagehot has called the "labours of the searching and introspective intellect," were, I think, altogether beyond his scope. Nor has he given us, nor could he have given us, any deep studies in the religious consciousness. These matters did not interest him; he had a robust and simple faith of his own, but by one who lived, in Emerson's phrase, "at large leisure in noble mornings" the struggles of the twilight of the soul were scarcely to be understood.

Again, I am ready to admit that he is no great exponent of the female temperament and mind—in his own class, that is to say, for the criticism is certainly not true of his peasants. For women he had an old-fashioned reverence, and, as someone has said, regarded them very much as a toast to be drunk after King and Constitution. But with the *nuances* of feminine character he was little concerned, and toward high passion between gentlefolk he showed always a certain timidity and repugnance. He was incapable of delving into the psychology of sex, for a reason which I think does him credit. He felt it ill-bred to pry into matters which a gentleman does not talk about in public. I do not suggest the severe doctrine that no man can write intimately of sex without forfeiting his title to gentility, but I do say that for Scott's type of gentleman to do so would have been impossible without a dereliction of standards. But, indeed, the question scarcely arises,

for even had he tried he would almost certainly have failed. I agree with Bagehot's pontifical sentences. "The same blunt sagacity of imagination which fitted him to excel in the rough description of obvious life, rather unfitted him for delineating the less substantial essence of the female character. The nice *minutiæ* of society, by means of which female novelists have been so successful in delineating their own sex, were rather too small for his robust and powerful mind." Woman—cultivated, gently-born woman—remained for him a toast.

What do these admissions amount to? That his knowledge and imaginative understanding of life had its limits, a charge which is true of every writer that ever lived, even of Shakespeare; that with certain rare types of character, in which Shakespeare excelled, he must have failed; that he regarded gentlewomen with perhaps too respectful an eye. Not certainly that the interest of the novels depends only on costume, and that the characters are drawn from the skin inwards and have no souls. Within the wide range of his understanding Scott drew character with a firmness, a subtlety, a propriety, which are not easy to match outside Shakespeare. The proof is to be found in the reading of the novels, and I should weary you if I were to make a list of the living, three-dimensioned figures, who are as completely realized in their minds as they are vividly depicted in their bodies—from people that hold the stage for long like Bailie Nicol Jarvie and Jeanie Deans and Dandie Dinmont and Edie Ochiltree, to those who merely enter and go, like Mrs. Howden in *The Heart of Midlothian*, or mine host Mackitchin-



son in *The Antiquary*, or Bessie Maclure sitting by the cross-roads to warn the Covenanters in *Old Mortality*. But since we are on the point of psychological subtlety let me give three less familiar instances. One is Robin Oig in "The Two Drovers," in whom the whole code of the perverse but logical Highland ethics is brilliantly summarized. Another is Chrystal Croftangry in the second series of *Chronicles of the Canongate*, a moving figure of regret and disillusioned philosophy. The third has been noted by Dr. Verrall, and can be verified by a careful reading of "Wandering Willie's Tale." That is a story where the explanation seems to be supernatural, and the narrator plainly believes this. But Scott knew so profoundly the average man and his incapacity for exact evidence, that he made Wandering Willie in telling the story give two different versions of the crucial incident—first, one which is consistent with a prosaic explanation, and a second in flat contradiction and full of excited detail, which transports the whole affair into the realm of the occult. It is a masterpiece of insight into character, and also surely one of the most astonishing examples of the *tour de force* in literature—to write a tale of *diablerie* which is overwhelming in its impression, and at the same time incidentally and most artfully to provide its refutation.

It is possible that the charge against Scott's character-drawing made by hasty critics is due to his avoidance of two habits, which have given certain novelists a specious appearance of profundity, but which I cannot but regard as vices. One is the trick of dissecting a character before

the reader's eyes and filling pages with laboured analysis. Scott held it his business to make men and women reveal themselves in speech and action, to play the showman as little as possible, to present a finished product and not to print the jottings of the laboratory. The other is the spurious drama which is achieved by a frequent recourse to the pathological. Leaving the supernatural aside for the moment, Scott is honourably averse to gaining effects by the use of mere ugliness and abnormality. He was perfectly conscious of the half-world of the soul and glances at it now and then to indicate its presence, but he held that there were better things to do than to wallow in its bogs. The truth is, the pathological is too easy. Take the case of religious mania, which Scott sketches in a figure like Ephraim MacBriar. You will find James Hogg treating it at length in his *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, with a subtlety worthy of the most modern realist and with a distinction of style to which unhappily few modern realists attain. But are we therefore to assume that Hogg had gifts of psychological penetration denied to Sir Walter? It was the same with other forms of ugliness. There is a wonderful little scene in *The Antiquary*, where Mrs. Mailsetter and her gossips meet and Mrs. Heukbane recalls the gallantries of her youth. "Ah! lasses, an ye had kend his brither as I did—mony a time he wad slip in to see me wi' a brace o' wild-deuks in his pouch, when my first gude-man was awa at the Falkirk tryst." In that scene you have the essence of all the sordid amours of a little Scots village, and Scott just notes their existence, and then goes his way to better things.



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For him the kitchen-midden was the kitchen-midden, a necessary and even a useful institution, but not one to be planted under the dining-room windows.

There remains the last and gravest count, which is principally Carlyle's—that the novels lack the high translunary things of literature, that they are adapted only for the type of reader called in America the "tired business man," what Carlyle terms "the task of harmlessly amusing indolent languid men"; that, again in Carlyle's words, "opinions, emotions, principles, doubts, beliefs, beyond what the intelligent country gentleman can carry along with him, are not to be found"; that "they do not found themselves on deep interests, but on comparatively trivial ones; not on the perennial, perhaps not even on the lasting." Some of this criticism, if you are in agreement with what I have already said, you will be prepared to reject at once. Clearly Scott carries us far beyond the country gentleman's intellectual equipment, and clearly he does much more than amuse. I suspect that Carlyle at the back of his mind hankered after something which we have no right to ask from an imaginative writer, something for which we must go to the professed philosophers or certain poets—a definite, formulated creed of life. He was a serious man, come of a serious stock and belonging to a very serious generation, and the tradition of Scottish Calvinism was in his blood. He wanted a message, a creed. Now there are good writers—but very few great writers—whose work is patently didactic, and about whom little handbooks can be written called "The Teaching of Mr. A——" or "The

Philosophy of Mr. B——.” I do not underrate the value of the moralist in letters. But it is not easy to pin the greatest imaginative writers down to one moral, or even to a code of morals. What is the teaching of Homer? What is the lesson of Shakespeare? It would be hard to say, for there are a thousand lessons. Genius such as theirs reveals men and women to themselves, and with a divine compassion expounds all the frailties and strivings of humanity. It would wrong their magnificence to force them into the bonds of any creed.

But Carlyle has still to be reckoned with. We have a right to demand from the greatest not only a brilliant picture of life but an interpretation, something, as he says, profitable for doctrine and edification, an awakening voice to the heroic that is in all men. “The sick heart will find no healing” in Scott, says Carlyle, but it is to be noted that Hazlitt took an opposite view. “How many sad hearts,” he exclaims, “have been soothed in pain and solitude!” I confess myself of Hazlitt’s opinion. It seems to me that Scott at his best accomplishes that enlargement and purification of life which is the test of great literature; he makes the world at once more solemn and more sunlit. The first he accomplishes by his sure instinct for the tragic, which is the failure of something not ignoble through inherent weakness or through a change of circumstance to which it cannot adapt itself. The Master of Ravenswood, whose quality is expended idly in a waste of pride; Fergus MacIvor carrying his high tradition to a felon’s death; Redgauntlet watching the Cause, which had been entwined with the arrogance of his



decaying house, shattered on the Solway beach—these are figures of a moving greatness. They are mirrors in which to read the transience of human glory and the fragility of human hopes. Always in his bustling world Scott is aware of the shadow of mortality. In his orderly scheme of rewards and penalties the Fates are permitted now and then to snap their illogical shears. It is a gay world, but at the last it is a solemn world, and few can so cunningly darken the stage and make the figures seem no longer men and women, but puppets moving under the eyes of God and Eternity.

I have left till now the question of Scott's use of the supernatural. Admittedly it is not always happy, and I am not prepared to defend the White Lady of Avenel, or to be enthusiastic about the Bodach Glas. But there are moments when he uses it as Shakespeare uses it, to trouble the mind with a sense of powers beyond our understanding, as if the monitors of another world whispered in our ear. He was a master of the eccentric and the uncanny, just because his outlook was so sane and central, for only a mind solidly buttressed with fact can bring mystery out of cloud-land into our common life. An instance is that grim scene at the tavern-board in Hell in "Wandering Willie's Tale"; another and a greater is to be found in the chapters of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, when Ailsie Gourlay predicts the Master's fate in the weird rhyme about the Kelpie's Flow, and when the witch-wives talk in the churchyard.

"He's a frank man, and a free-handed man, the Master . . . and a comely personage—broad in the

shoulders and narrow around the lungies—he wad mak a bonny corpse—I wad like to hae the streaking and winding o' him."

"It is written on his brow, Annie Winnie . . . that hand of woman, or of man either, will never straught him—dead-deal will never be laid on his back—make you your market of that, for I hae it frae a sure hand."

"Will it be his lot to die on the battle-ground then, Ailsie Gourlay? Will he die by the sword or the ball, as his forbears hae dune before him, mony ane o' them?"

"Ask nae mair questions about it—he'll no be graced sae far," replied the sage.

"I ken ye are wiser than ither folk, Ailsie Gourlay—but wha tell'd ye this?"

"Fashna your thumb about that, 'Annie Winnie,'" answered the sibyl; "I hae it frae a hand sure enough."

"But ye said ye never saw the foul thief," reiterated her inquisitive companion.

"I hae it frae as sure a hand," said Ailsie, "and frae them that spaed his fortune before the sark gaed ower his head."

"Hark! I hear his horse's feet riding aff," said the other; "they dinna sound as if good luck was wi' them."

"Mak haste, sirs," cried the paralytic hag from the cottage, "and let us do what is needfu', and say what is fitting; for, if the dead corpse binna straughted, it will girn and thraw, and that will fear the best o' us."

Observe the art of that phrase "frae a sure hand"; observe the cumulative impression of the broken dialogue with its ghoulish details; observe, above all, the tremendous effect of the sound of the horse's feet breaking in. It is a scene which for unearthly tension is not far behind the knocking at the door in *Macbeth*.

But if he makes the world more solemn he also makes it sunnier. That is the moral consequence of comedy, and in comedy in the widest sense



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Scott is most clearly the master. It was this side of his work that made Byron declare in that famous correspondence between the two that among the living he found no one of whom Scott could with reason be jealous, or, all things considered, among the dead. The novels enlarge our vision, light up dark corners, break down foolish barriers, and make life a happier and more spacious thing. If they do not preach any single philosophy, they, in Shelley's words, "repeal large codes of fraud and woe." They restore faith in humanity by revealing its forgotten graces and depths.

Is there nothing here for comfort and edification? Is there no more than the utterance of the intelligent country gentleman? One instance of this enlargement I will give you, and then I have done. No professed prophet of democracy ever achieved so much for the plain man as this Tory Border laird. Others might make the peasant a pathetic figure, or a humorous, or lovable, but Scott made him sublime, without departing one hair's-breadth from the strictest faithfulness in portraying him. It is not a queen or a great lady who lays down the profoundest laws of conduct; it is Jeanie Deans.

"Alas! it is not when we sleep soft and wake merrily ourselves, that we think on other people's sufferings. Our hearts are waxed light within us then, and we are for righting our ain wrangs and fighting our ain battles. But when the hour of trouble comes to the mind or to the body—as seldom may it visit your leddyship—and when the hour of death comes, that comes to high and low—long and late may it be yours—oh, my leddy, then it isna what we hae dune for oursells, but what we hae

dune for others, that we think on most pleasantly. And the thought that ye hae intervened to spare the puir thing's life will be sweeter in that hour, come when it may, than if a word of your mouth could hang the hail Porteous mob at the tail of ae tow."

It is not the kings and captains who most eloquently preach love of country, but Edie Ochiltree, the beggar, who has no belongings but a blue gown and a wallet.

"*Me* no muckle to fight for, sir? isna there the country to fight for, and the burnsidies that I gang daundering beside, and the hearths o' the gudewives that gie me my bit bread, and the bits o' weans that come toddling to play wi' me when I come about a landward town? Deil! . . . an I had as gude pith as I hae gude-will and a gude cause, I should gie some o' them a day's kemping."

And it is the same Edie who in the great scene of the storm speaks words which, while wholly and exquisitely in character, are also part of the world's poetry.

"That's not worth the counting," said the old man. "I hae lived to be weary o' life; and here or yonder—at the back o' a dyke, in a wreath o' snaw, or in the wame o' a wave, what signifies how the auld gaberlunzie dies?"

"Good man," said Sir Arthur, "can you think of nothing?—of no help?—I'll make you rich—I'll give you a farm—I'll——"

"Our riches will be soon equal," said the beggar, looking out upon the strife of the waters—"they are sae already; for I hae nae land, and you would give your fair bounds and barony for a square yard of rock that would be dry for twal hours."

We are familiar enough with laudations of lowly

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virtue, but they are apt to be a little patronizing in tone; the writers are inclined to enter the "huts where poor men lie" with the condescension of a district visitor. It is Scott, the Tory country gentleman, the worldling, whom some would have us discard as superficial, that lifts them into the clear air of the heroic.

II

THE OLD AND THE NEW IN  
LITERATURE



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## THE OLD AND THE NEW IN LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

IN THE ANCIENT FOUNDATION OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE in Oxford every Christmas Day a dinner is held, at which choristers sing antique carols, and a boar's head, crowned with laurel and rosemary, is brought in by a stately procession. The ceremony commemorates, it is said, the adventures of a scholar of the College who, walking one afternoon in a glade of Shotover Forest, reading a work of Aristotle, was suddenly attacked by a boar. The scholar was a man of action; he thrust his book down the boar's throat, crying, "Græcum est," and the beast curled up and died. What is the moral of the tale? Perhaps that the boar might have digested a translation, but could not swallow the original text—in which case it is an encouragement to read a work in the language in which it was written. Perhaps it teaches the value of books as defensive weapons, and is therefore an advertisement for booksellers. But on the whole I am inclined to think that it points to the compelling power of the classics. The latest contemporary work of, say, St. Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus would not have been so effective. It was because the book was Aristotle and in

<sup>1</sup> A paper read to the Royal Society of Literature, January 26, 1925.

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Greek that the scholar triumphed. Wherefore, if we are attacked by a boar, in animal or human guise, let us thrust a classic down his throat and he will cease from troubling.

It is an expedient which has been adopted since the beginning of the history of letters. The Athenian conservatives confounded the young radicals with Homer, Aristophanes flung Æschylus at the head of Euripides, the Roman Tory silenced the literary youth of his day with Ennius. The strife of old and new, classic and modern, has been going on merrily since the cave-man discovered a new way of making pictures on bone, and was snubbed by the elders of his tribe, who pointed to certain ancient daubs on the cave wall as the last word in art. It is a mistake to say, as I have heard it said, that the strife can only be waged in an era which lacks a strong creative impulse, for we find it in the Elizabethan age. Gabriel Harvey was preaching, not without acceptance, his thin classicism, when Spenser was inventing new melodies, and Shakespeare was creating new worlds. The conflict reached its height perhaps about the close of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, when the comparative merits of Ancients and Moderns turned the educated world into one vast debating society. The French Academy, you remember, led off, when Charles Perrault in 1687 cast a doubt on the plenary inspiration of the Ancients. The English Universities followed with an extravagant defence, and the issue was joined in the domains of art and science as well as of literature. A "battle of the books" in which Sir William Temple and Richard Bentley and Jonathan Swift



were protagonists was no mean quarrel, and if we take sides to-day in the same causes we are following august precedents.

I propose this afternoon to try to state the issues in contemporary terms, for I think you will agree with me that these issues are still alive. But let me preface my remarks by saying that it is the best kind of quarrel, since it can never be settled. Thank God, we shall always have both conservatives and radicals among us, for they represent eternally the two sides of the human head. Both defend a truth which is not all the truth. Their dogmas are what philosophers call "antinomies," opposites but not necessarily contradictories. The Moderns in the Bentley-Temple controversy fought, as the late Sir Walter Raleigh has said, for "the ideals of progress and of science, the right of a nation to its own literature, the enfranchisement of art from the eternal reproduction of old models, and of science from the dogmatic pedantry of the schools." The Ancients opposed the cheap self-gratulation of the new age, argued in favour of the existence of eternal principles in art, foreshadowed the historical standpoint, and combated an atomic individualism and a petulant anarchy. In such a war we may hope for an ultimate harmony and peace, but the victory of either side would be disastrous, for each is in the right.

Let us be clear about one point at the start. Neither creed has its beginnings with the artist himself. The poet, the creator, if he be worth the name, follows the instincts of his own genius. It is only when he grows self-conscious, when he begins to theorize about his art and becomes a

critic, that the quarrel starts. It is when he transforms his perfectly sound tastes into what may be very dubious judgments. I should like to see an anthology compiled of critical dicta, the work of wise men, which time has made ridiculous. Thomas Hobbes, who had a mind of remarkable range and vigour, thought that Sir John Davenant's *Gondibert*, which we do not now greatly admire, "would last as long as the *Æneid* or the *Iliad*." Byron thought Samuel Rogers a good poet and Mr. Hayley's *Triumphs of Temper* an enduring work. Lord Jeffrey, after disparaging some of the noblest things in Scott and Wordsworth, praised Felicia Hemans in language which would be extravagant if applied to Sappho. The *Quarterly Review* considered Milman's unreadable epic *The Fall of Jerusalem* certain "of whatever immortality the English language can bestow." These, be it noted, are instances, not of insensitiveness to a new and strange voice, which is natural enough in human nature—an ear attuned to Pope would take some time to get accustomed to Blake—but of preposterous praise given to contemporaries. They are examples, which might be indefinitely multiplied, of the fallibility of mortal judgment, and they are due to a bias, which may now be conservative and now revolutionary—a distortion caused by temperament or circumstance. Hobbes praised *Gondibert* because there was a touch of the new rationalism in it; Jeffrey, who was a conservative at heart, liked Mrs. Hemans because he liked the familiar sentimental conventions.

But behind all these accidental biases there seems to me to be a broad distinction between



minds, which gives reality and dignity to the eternal dispute. There is the mind which loves law and order, and which exults in the continuity of things, and there is the mind which craves adventure and change and likes to think of the world as each morning a new birth. It is the distinction (shall we say?) not so much between age and youth, as between the conformist temper and the non-conformist; between the static and the dynamic; between Apollo and Dionysos; between ordered power and disordered ecstasy; between the pæan and the dithyramb; or in the words of the Book of Isaiah, between those who say "In returning and in rest shall we be saved: in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength," and those whose cry is "We will flee upon horses, we will ride upon the swift." Define these two moods by their virtues, and it is the opposition between learning, discipline, tradition, service, the slow labour of art, and freedom and originality; define them by their vices, and it is reaction, ossification, convention, set against revolution, slovenliness, wilfulness, impatience. It is cool blood against hot blood, sobriety against enthusiasm. As a matter of fact, of course, the opposition is never complete; for the most fiery voluntary is not independent of tradition, and the most stubborn conservatism has its odd romantic moments; but we can fairly place the two schools by their predominant qualities. Not schools, indeed—the word is a misnomer; let us rather say moods and attitudes and inclinations of mind.

First, let me present to you my young friend Theophilus as a type of intellectual youth, and a



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very good type he is. He is not one of those pallid, whiskered people in strange garments who live in æsthetic suburbs. Theophilus is no product of black coffee and indifferent cigarettes. He smokes a pipe and is an amateur of Rugby football. He left school to join the army in 1917, had a roughish time in France, and returned to civilian life with a number of passionate enthusiasms for things which he understood, and a multitude of not less passionate contempts for things of which he had no knowledge at all. Youth, as he saw it, had been cruelly victimized, and it was now the business of youth to vindicate its rights. He makes his living as a journalist, and a very honest and competent journalist he has become; but in his leisure he has written several novels and books of verse which have won him attention, and have been on their appearance respectfully and elaborately reviewed in the intellectual weeklies by young men and women of his own way of thinking. Let me add that he is an earnest, if somewhat critical, member of the Independent Labour Party. He had a sound education, and has assiduously enlarged it. During the war he became an excellent French scholar, and the language of M. Marcel Proust presents no difficulties to him as it does to me. He has more than a smattering of science, has dabbled in metaphysics, and has read widely in English and foreign literatures. Indeed in our own literature he has tastes which one might almost call antiquarian, and is perpetually discovering some obscure seventeenth-century divine or eighteenth-century versifier whose merits he preaches to his friends. He is particularly eloquent about one

William Stump, an eighteenth-century Warwickshire ploughman, whose solitary piece of verse he puts in the highest class. With much of his preference for our older writers I agree, but Theophilus is also an ecstatic admirer of the work of our own time. As he sees it, we are living in an age of adventure, and embarking on all manner of hopeful voyages. The verse, the prose, the criticism, the speculation, the fiction of our youth are all to him good in themselves and full of an infinite promise. He is no decrrier of the past, indeed he loves to wander in its by-paths, but he will have none of what he calls its "dead hand." Each generation, he holds, has to make its own canons and forms of art, and to accept those of our fathers and grandfathers is merely to hobble our feet in the race. "We may take some bad tosses," he once told me, "but at any rate we are moving, and it is better to bark our shins than to be dead."

I have a great admiration and liking for Theophilus, and the other day, when I lunched with him in Soho, I put to him some of my difficulties. We talked first, I remember, of poetry. I said that I found it hard to get my ear accustomed to certain modern licences in rhythm—that, in fact, I found them cacophonous. I added that I could not find the clarity and simplicity I liked, that poetry had become a palimpsest of chaotic reflections and impressions, and that I missed form and architecture. He smiled indulgently.

"That's merely because your ear has grown dull. Anybody who had got accustomed to the Popian couplet would have felt the same thing about Blake or Shelley. We are making new tunes, and in fifty years the world will have grown



accustomed to these too, and will have to make others."

"But I don't call them tunes," I objected.

"No more would the Popian have called Shelley's tunes. He would have called them the discords of Chaos."

I was silenced, so I changed my ground. "You choke up your verse with details. You don't select enough. You jumble the essential and the trivial in one rag-bag."

He was inclined to admit some truth in this, but he had his defence. "It's our richness," he said, "like the Elizabethans. We love Nature and we want to give the effect of 'God's plenty.' The old way of writing about her was to have some dozen conventional phrases — 'bosky glades,' 'verdant groves,' 'silver floods' — that sort of thing. Then Tennyson came along, and made the phrases very recondite and beautiful, and put some real observation into them, but they were still conventional. He didn't see Nature as she is, but as a set of blank verse lines. . . . Our fellows get right down to her and look at her for themselves. It is no case now of doling out a few dozen literary epithets, but of a patient and intimate observation of all her moods."

"That's very fine," I said, "but it doesn't always come off. I'm not a poet, only a humble field-naturalist. But I read a poem the other day about a moor in autumn, full of your patient and intimate observation, and in six lines I found three bad mistakes about the habits of birds. One might have thought the writer had never been outside Bloomsbury."

"Oh, they make mistakes, no doubt," he



replied airily, "but the spirit is right, and it's a new thing in our literature, except for——" and he quoted two poets long since dead of whom I had never heard.

After that we began to talk about fiction. He cross-examined me about my tastes with a twinkle in his eye, for he firmly believes that I have no interest in stories which are not concerned with pirates. Rather to his surprise he found that I had read quite a number of novels of which he specially approved, and was ready to admit their merits. With much skill he drew from me my halting criticisms. Then he thoughtfully filled his pipe, and fixed me, like the Ancient Mariner, with his glittering eye.

"The novel," he began impressively, "is the modern epic, the modern ballad, the popular form in which the life of our age naturally expresses itself. That form has been widening its bounds ever since Defoe. It enlarged itself from the novel of polite manners to embrace the life of the past, with Scott; with Dickens it took hold of all strata of society; Meredith gave it psychological subtlety; Victor Hugo brought epic poetry into it; Tolstoi gave it a social philosophy; the later Russians carried it into the dark places of the human soul. It is steadily advancing in subtlety and scope, and why on earth should we set limits to it? It claims complete freedom, because it deals with all there is of life and death.

"Now for your objections. You say that Mr. So-and-So and Miss This-and-That write badly. Well, you can't expect the glib, pat Stevensonian style. They are not carving nut-shells or painting fans, but trying to reproduce the rough-and-tumble

of life. I am sick of this cant of style. Anyhow, they write as well as your precious Scott or Dickens." ("No, they don't," I interjected, but he took no notice of my interruption.)

"Then you say that the form is crude. You only mean that there is not the neat beginning, middle, and end to which the older novelists accustomed you. Why should we not make new forms for ourselves? We are dealing with a far greater complex of life, and must burst the trammels of earlier conventions. We saturate ourselves with life, and instead of fitting it into the Procrustean bed of a literary form, we let life produce its own form, its own unity. Your criticism might have been urged by Lady Fanny Flummery against Thackeray, and by Mrs. Henry Wood against Tolstoi, and by Miss Braddon against Thomas Hardy. It is the perpetual conflict of the conventionalist against the new creation.

"Again you say that a novel must have a story, and depends for its value upon its moments of high drama. I agree. But the story may be of the processes of the mind, the action and the drama may lie wholly in the spiritual sphere. You say that the diary of the thoughts and emotions of a chemist's assistant in Balham is not a subject for fiction. I utterly disagree. It may afford the profoundest drama. You are obsessed, my dear fellow, with the old sword-and-cloak romance. To you action is something violent and melodramatic, a fight or an escape; but you may get drama which is spiritually more significant out of crossing a room or writing a letter. You forget that to-day we know far more about the human



personality. We don't think of it as a smooth, well-defined thing, but as a perpetual conflict of conscious and subconscious, so that there may be elements of ape and tiger in your amiable young woman which would scare a Wild West desperado. Your hero or heroine need never leave the streets of a suburb to have adventures stranger than those of any figure in Dumas. There may be conflicts in the soul of a provincial schoolmaster with more dramatic value for art than the taking of Jerusalem. . . . What you and fellows like you hanker after is not the artistic but the theatrical—you want a dapper *coup de théâtre*, an effective curtain. Well, all I have got to say is that that is not life, nor any sort of reality.

"You complain, too, of the excessive predominance of sex in our novels. Why not? It is the most important thing in life, and we can't get near the truth without it. Freud has taught us that our whole unconscious self has a sexual basis. We have none of the old glutinous sentimentality about the relations of men and women. We look upon them with a healthily scientific eye, but the immense significance of sex cannot be shirked. We are following the normal path; it is you, who would shut your eyes to it, that are the abnormal."

I confess I was much impressed by these last remarks, for I know Theophilus to be the least morbid or susceptible of my friends, and, as I have said, to be more interested in Rugby football than in female society. His creed was clearly the outcome of reflection and not of natural bias.

As we walked together towards Fleet Street, he



gave me in a few general sentences his philosophy of letters.

"Life," he said, "is our raw material—all there is of life. There is no subject which is not worthy and significant. We decline to rule out any province from art, merely because our predecessors neglected it. A man must let life soak into him, and let life itself dictate the artistic form. I am all for the older books, but you said rightly the other day that my interest in them was mainly antiquarian. I refuse to let them influence my work or determine my methods. Our duty is to the living, breathing world around us, and not to the dead. We must serve our age as our grandfathers no doubt tried to serve theirs. What was it that Walter Pater said—that the soul of man should be a transparency through which the lights of the world will shine? That's my creed, and I want to keep the transparency clear, neither dulled by the fog of the past, nor with the flowers of sentiment painted on it, like a plush mirror in a lodging-house. We want the truth, because only the truth will make us free."

The sight of the clock at the Law Courts made him bid me a hurried farewell, and he departed to write an article for his paper on the political deficiencies of Mr. Baldwin.

I was greatly interested in what Theophilus had said, and I pondered over it for the better part of a week. Then it occurred to me that I could best hear the other side from my friend Septimus. Septimus is a gentleman somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age, who, having been left a competence by his father, has devoted his life to the formation of a fine library, and to county busi-

ness in his native Gloucestershire. At Oxford he was a distinguished classical scholar, and a Fellow of All Souls' College, but since he left the University he has interested himself rather in historical research and the by-ways of our own literature. He has published little beyond an edition of Gray, and a monograph on the classical elements in English nursery rhymes—he derived *Nuts in May*, I think, from Martial's "Jam tristis nucibus puer relictis"—but he has delighted his friends with various private publications in the nature of *jeux d'esprit*—I remember especially his proof that Shakespeare was mainly responsible for the Authorized Version of the Bible, and that the Roman Wall was built, not by the Romans to keep the Picts out, but by the Picts to keep the Romans in. From Septimus I confidently expected to get the corrective to Theophilus, if corrective was needed, for, though a voracious and omnivorous reader, he has that stout conservative temper of mind which is found chiefly among those who in politics have been lifelong Liberals.

I found him in the smoking-room on the top floor of the Athenæum, in vigorous enjoyment of tea and crumpets. When he had stayed his hunger, I put before him the views of Theophilus, as well as I remembered them. He is an admirable listener, and heard me out patiently while I repeated the arguments of my gifted young friend. Sometimes he chuckled, sometimes he dissented, and frequently, to my surprise, he nodded his head in approval.

"That sounds a good class of lad," he observed when I had finished. "He takes the trouble to know his own mind. He's all right."



"But you don't agree with him?" I asked with some anxiety.

"Of course I don't agree with him. But then, in ten years' time he won't agree with himself. At any rate he's alive, and that's the great matter.

"Your friend," he continued, "is dead right about one thing. Each age has to decide its own forms in art for itself. If it merely accepts the traditional ones it becomes a gramophone, drearily grinding out old records. It is the same with philosophies and religious creeds. A man may call himself a Platonist or a Hegelian, but he is a humbug unless he re-thinks these philosophies for himself, and makes them his own, and gives them the accent of his age. The first virtue in everything is sincerity."

"Then you agree with Theophilus?" I put in.

"Up to a point. But where we should differ, I fancy, is in our definition of form. Art demands shape and selection and infinite labour. Scrap all the old modes, if you like, and invent new ones—but the new ones must still be *forms, structures*, not waywardness and slackness. Mere casual, wilful eccentricity is just as bad as conventionalism—worse, indeed, for it speedily becomes itself a convention, only uglier and more shapeless than the old. There is nothing more terrible than the conventionality of the insincere unconventional. Take the instance you quoted—the poetry of Nature. We have got a sort of field-naturalist's attitude into our verse, and we aim at close and intimate observation. That is all to the good, but if we shirk the duty, and give bogus observation and a merely literary intimacy, it is far worse than the old niminy-piminy pastoral business, for we



profess far more, and our humbug is the more shameless.

"But on the whole," he added, "I have not much fault to find with the work of our modern poets. The chief lack is a strong poetical inspiration—but that will come no doubt—that will come. The war was very bad for the poor fellows. It was too severe an experience, and they haven't quite found an adjustment. The stuff of poetry, as we are all agreed, is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' They had the emotion, but they haven't yet found the tranquillity. We may look for the beneficent effects of the war, I fancy, in about ten years' time. . . . Indeed, my complaint is that these young people are too much preoccupied with form. They have more form than inspiration. Their declared revolt against traditionalism shows it. When a man is full of original stuff, he soaks in tradition as naturally as he breathes, and glories in it. Look at Burns. There, if you like, was a new voice, and yet it was the product of five hundred years of Scottish song-making which found in him its culmination "

I was beginning to think that Septimus was much of a piece with Theophilus, and that one whom I believed to be a *laudator temporis acti* was in reality an ultra-modern. But presently he reassured me.

"On the other hand," he said, "I have very little sympathy with your friend's views on the novel. That, I confess, seems to me to be in a parlous case, in spite of an inordinate number of clever writers. I agree with him that the novel should be always enlarging its boundaries, and I would exempt no part of life from its legitimate

province. But there my agreement stops."

Septimus got to his feet and warmed his back at the fire, for the hearth-rug is the natural pulpit of the conservative Englishman.

"There is an infernal lot of nonsense," he said, "talked about Life. Life and art can never be the same thing. Art is Life interpreted and made significant, the beauty and the drama and the meaning of our confused existence elicited by selection, the essential relieved from the surplusage of the trivial. Therefore a novel must have shape and purpose, and the shape and purpose must be given it by the creative mind. You may have an infinity of detail, or you may have very little, but it must all be significant. I read the other day an American novel—*Babbitt*, I think, was its name—the best I have read for years. At first I thought it was simply a welter of details about a hideous kind of life and most unpleasant people, and then slowly I saw it shaping and composing itself, until the vulgar little hero became a universal and eternal thing—yes, and mightily attractive, just because he was so honestly interpreted. But"—and here Septimus's voice became doleful—"I have struggled through novels which were simply a desert of accurate trivialities, not the less trivial because they were ugly. Photographs, if you like, but not art; information, but not the truth. Ghastly unreality I call it. There is more reality and more art in the shilling 'shocker.'"

Septimus was now fairly mounted upon his high horse. "That stuff is raw material, and it is mere impudence to present it as if it were anything else. I don't want to be shown the incoherent thoughts and emotions of some middle-aged virgin unless



these things *get me somewhere*. They have no value in themselves. They are not life—they are literature, only bad literature, for they represent the abstraction and isolation of one aspect of the complex we call life. Or rather they are science, and rather bad science—the kind of thing that psychological laboratories produce, and have the decency not to label art. You must have somewhere drama and beauty, and that stuff has never a spark of it. It is like dining off a bran-mash.

“But I go a great deal further. In one sense the field of fiction is as wide as the world, but in practice a good many provinces may be ruled out. The merely pathological, for instance. For true drama, we must have action, striving, and not only suffering. The final result should be beauty, and that means some kind of triumph, not merely drab acquiescence. That is why most of the Russians, who are now the fashion, seem to me to be eternally in the second class. You will find it all in Aristotle.”

Septimus looked round the shelves for a copy of the *Poetics*, and not finding one, seized upon a volume of Matthew Arnold.

“Here,” he cried, “is the same thing in other words,” and he read:

“What are the situations from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived? They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life, they



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are painful, not tragic; the representation of them in poetry is painful also."

He laid down the book. "That is God's truth. It is from Arnold's 1853 Preface, and it is as true of the novel as of poetry. Drab, dismal pathology is not true to life—if any man had the unfeathered existence of some characters in modern fiction he would have cut his throat long ago—and it is desperately untrue to art. For a writer to declare that his dinginess is art, is just as if a sculptor of a fat provincial mayor claimed to be the equal of Michelangelo because he had been faithful to his model. The mayor's statue is not true to life because, as a statue, it has no relation to what is significant in humanity.

"Then," continued Septimus, "I utterly dissent from all this twaddle about sex. If your friend says that the subconscious self is mainly concerned with sex, I reply that that is a theory for which not an atom of true scientific proof has ever been forthcoming. It is a return to mediæval superstition. Anyhow I am sick of this psycho-analysis chatter. What is new in it is mostly rubbish, and what is true is as old as the hills. The real reason why sex plays such a part in fiction is commercial—it is the circulating libraries, where most of the customers are women. The modern novelist who specializes in sex is not being bold and original; he is following a bad commercial convention of his craft which arose because the old novel has to be made to appeal to idle and sentimental ladies. It has nothing to do with art, and less with life."

/ I observed that Septimus was a crusted

bachelor, and therefore scarcely entitled to speak on such high matters. At that he exploded.

"All the more reason why I should speak. I have no bias, but I have seen a good deal of life and read a good deal of literature. Does anyone seriously pretend that the love of a man and woman is the only thing of first-class importance? What about the relations of man and woman to their God, to their fellows, to their country? Some donkeys talk as if the only real tragedy was a disastrous love affair. Bosh! There's as much tragic material in the relations of parents and children, or the relations of friendship, or some great impersonal cause like statesmanship or war. The only love tragedy in the *Iliad* is the story of Anteia and Bellerophon, and it occupies exactly six lines out of fifteen thousand. You remember Dr. Johnson on one of Pope's poems? He said that 'poetry is not often worse employed than in dignifying the amorous fury of a raving girl.' I agree—raving girl or raving hobbledehoy. Do you realize how few of the very greatest of Shakespeare's plays deal with love in the ordinary sense? Dr. Johnson said the reason was that 'love has no great influence on the sum of life.' I think that perhaps is to go too far, but love is only one among the major influences, and of late years it has been ridiculously over-rated. Why does your young friend, while clamouring for the existence of the province of the novel, want in practice to confine it to that dreary farmyard? The thing is Oriental, a bad derivation from the East, and I fancy that the root of the trouble is that we have too many bright young Hebrews, male and female, trying their hand at the novel to-day."



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I was rather shocked at this way of talking, and, as I had to leave to catch my train, I was forced to cut short the flow of Septimus's eloquence. But I remember his last words: "It is foolish to worry about revolt in anything—literature or politics. We human beings are what many generations have made us, and even if we want to we cannot divest ourselves of the past and march naked into a new world. It is quite right that youth should be hostile to tradition and hot for new things, but if a fellow has any real stuff in him, he will come to see that the only freedom is that which comes from the willing and reasoned acceptance of discipline, and the only true originality that which springs from the re-birth of historic tradition in a man's soul."

Then, just as I was leaving, he said a thing which gave me ground for reflection on my journey home. "There is nothing wrong with the *practice* of youth," he said. "It is bound to experiment and splash about till it finds itself, and the more vigorously it splashes, the better I like it. The trouble only begins when it embarks on *theories*. These are bound to be crude and partial. *Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait*. Power and energy can be attributes of youth, not wisdom. Its deeds are right, but its creeds are usually wrong, and its literary criticism is apt to be damned nonsense." He shouted something after me as I left the room, which I think was a quotation from Aristotle.

I have tried to make clear to you the points of view of my two estimable friends. On thinking over their words, I began to suspect that the whole



## OLD AND NEW IN LITERATURE

dispute might be largely a bogus one. On the major matters there seemed to be a surprising agreement. They recognized the same fundamentals, but from slightly different angles of vision. The full truth might lie in neither case, and both in their way might be right. As I reflected in my confused way, I wondered if there might not be two legitimate attitudes, the one proper for youth and the creative artist, and the other for maturity, the scholar and the critic?

I am inclined to think myself that if a man has not been a revolutionary at some time in his life he will never come to much. A certain arrogance and revolt at one stage are proof of a vigorous personality, which has first to assert itself against the world before it can accept and remodel the world so as to make it its own. At that stage a man should be very sensitive to the atmosphere of his time, and should rate it extravagantly high, simply because it is his own. It is the medium in which he must live and work, and if he shuts himself off from it he will become a fossil. If he is a writer or painter or musician, he ought to think that he lives in a new dawn of the world, for that will give him courage and confidence. It is right that he should over-rate the work of his own day, because it speaks to him with a living and intimate voice. When Hobbes said that *Gondibert* was better than the *Odyssey*, he did not really mean that Davenant was greater than Homer, but that *Gondibert* had an appeal to him and his contemporaries, something new and hopeful, which he did not find in the Greek. When an undergraduate tells me that some writer whose books seem to me like the howling of a demented

wolf is a greater novelist than Meredith, he means—unless he is merely repeating like a parrot somebody else's opinion—that this writer is trying to do with the novel something which nobody has quite tried before, and in which he (the undergraduate) is deeply interested. I am all for a man living the life of his contemporaries, even if these contemporaries are rather silly; it is a great deal better to be silly than to be dead.

Therefore, on thinking over the talk of my two gifted friends, I have come diffidently to the conclusion that for a man who wants to make things and do things, whether he be an artist or a man of affairs, the attitude of Theophilus is the right one from which to start. It has the motive power, the gusto, the impetus, which is the foundation of achievement. But if it halts to expound itself and formulate principles it will be apt to make a mess of it. *Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait*—youth eternally has the power but not the wisdom. Youth makes a bad critic, for it simply has not the knowledge. Therefore I confess I am a little bored with some of the solemn interpretations of youthful work written by youth in the serious weeklies. Criticism is primarily judgment, and judgment is a matter of perspective, and perspective is a matter of knowledge. Let youth create and build, for, if it is honest with itself, as it toils, it will acquire the wisdom which does not come from hasty generalization.

And this wisdom will be in substance the wisdom of the ancients. Each successive generation will contribute to this wisdom, will modify and enlarge it, but the enduring stock remains. That is where the reconciliation lies between old and



new, age and youth. In the mature canon of Delphi there is harmony between Apollo and Dionysos. Life is a process in which we slowly and painfully discover the quality of our fathers. We must discover it for ourselves, and not take it docilely from their lips, but discover it, if we are honest, we certainly shall. There is uncommonly little that is new under the sun in the greater matters of life. We may alter our material environment beyond recognition, but we make no change in the human heart. The eternal dramas are the same; young love is the same, whether it be Nausicaa in Phæacia, or Juliet in Verona, or Lucy Desborough in Surrey; courage against odds does not change from Hector in Troy to Bussy d'Amboise in Paris; a wild journey of rescue has the same thrill if the rescuer be a horseman clattering along the French roads or a pilot in an aeroplane; and in the inner warfare of the soul, Phædra is not less subtle than a creation of M. Marcel Proust. The ideals and the canons of art remain the same, infinitely elastic yet inexorably binding, from Homer to Mr. Thomas Hardy; and generous youth, which begins with revolt, ends with acquiescence, simply because anarchy is not a creed in which a man can abide. Stevenson has put this truth in a famous passage:

“ So in youth, like Moses from the mountain, we have sights of that House Beautiful of art which we shall never enter. They are dreams and unsubstantial; visions of style that repose upon no base of human meaning; the last heart-throbs of that excited amateur that must die in all of us before the artist can be born. But they come to us in such a rainbow of glory that all subsequent achievement appears dull and earthly in comparison. We



were all artists; almost all in the age of illusion, cultivating an imaginary genius, and walking to the strains of some deceiving Ariel; small wonder, indeed, if we were happy! But art, of whatever nature, is a kind mistress; and though these dreams of youth fall by their own baselessness, others succeed, graver and more substantial; the symptoms change, the amiable malady endures; and still, at an equal distance, the House Beautiful shines upon the hill-top."

"Graver and more substantial." It is the just and natural course of life, and I am inclined to amuse myself with a picture of my friend Theophilus some ten years hence eating crumpets in the upper smoking-room of the Athenæum, and talking in much the same strain as the Septimus of to-day.

There are of course melancholy cases of arrested development. In each generation there are instances of coteries which never change, youth which never grows up, and which carries its crudities noisily into middle life. Those *petites chapelles* generally make some clamour in the world, for they are adepts at advertisement and propaganda. I remember that, when I was very young and just beginning to be interested in literature, there was a school much in vogue which I did not love. Its members made a fetish of style and a great parade of looking clearly and boldly at life, deriving their creed, I think, from a few misunderstood sentences of Walter Pater. In ethics they expounded an unscholarly paganism, they made little excursions in flamboyant naughtiness, and their style was a painful search for the inapposite word. I remember that their vogue irritated me profoundly, till I came across

similar schools, who, except for a mention in the histories of letters, are now utterly forgotten. Well, the æsthetes have shared the fate of the Della Cruscans and the Spasmodics, and so with the other coteries that have succeeded them. They make a little noise and vanish; *securus judicat orbis terrarum*. For honest youth let us have every tolerance, but on such senile and decaying youth we need not waste our charity. Yet the grasshoppers are apt to become a burden, and if they are insistent and provocative, there is no other recourse but to the great canon of the past. We are entitled, if we meet this kind of bore, to follow the example of the mediæval scholar of Queen's in Shotover Forest, and, exclaiming "Græcum est," to thrust Aristotle down his throat. If the book does not slay, there is at any rate a good chance that it may silence.

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III

LORD BALFOUR AND ENGLISH  
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## LORD BALFOUR AND ENGLISH THOUGHT<sup>1</sup>

VERSATILITY IS A DANGEROUS ENDOWMENT FOR AN English statesman. The ordinary man likes to think that his masters, as the phrase goes, "attend to business," and regards the liberal arts as things to be generously eulogized at public functions, but not to be practised without a certain loss of prestige. Learned serjeants "shook their heads at Murray as a wit," and honest Tories thought none the better of Disraeli for writing novels. If a statesman's political effectiveness is thereby weakened, so also does his political notoriety prevent him from getting fair play in his unpartisan interests. Critics who may follow him into the grove of the Muses seek, as a rule, only black-thorns to beat or laurels to garland the politician. So he may be said to suffer both ways, being an Israelite in Gath and a Philistine in Jerusalem. But if the career be sufficiently prolonged and illustrious the fashion changes, and what was once counted to a man for weakness becomes an added glory.

Lord Balfour has outlived the prejudice of his detachment. He is recognized as possessing an

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted, *mutatis mutandis*, from *The Times Literary Supplement*, May 7, 1914.



intellectual equipment not surpassed, and probably not equalled, among contemporary statesmen. In the 'eighties worthy people were a little disturbed by the *Defence of Philosophic Doubt*; he has since discoursed on a similar subject to the delight of crowded audiences and to the admiration of everyone who reads the newspapers. What is interesting in his case is that there are not two Lord Balfours. Early in life he discovered what attracted him, selected a standpoint, and developed the complex of tastes and views which we call a temperament. The æsthetic creed of the essay on Handel is the same as that of the Romanes address. The argument of *Philosophic Doubt* is more or less that of the Gifford Lectures. And further, the gifts which made him an incomparable Parliamentarian are the gifts which appear in all that he writes and says on matters never mentioned in the House of Commons. The temperament remains the same, though the medium alters; an uncommon temperament, curiously self-contained and complete, and free from loose ends and misty corners. It is sharply outlined against its background; and this is what we mean when we talk about distinction.

## I

Lord Balfour's mind has few contemporary affinities, but it suggests many kinships in the past, especially in the eighteenth century. This is not to say that he is as one born out of due season; for your true Georgian was exquisitely in tune with his age, and Lord Balfour is alive to every *nuance* of the modern world. But in his

interest he preserves a certain aloofness, always moving a step or two back to get a better view. He is conscious of the present; but he is also and at all times overwhelmingly conscious of the past. He has the eighteenth century sense of living in a world which was not made yesterday, and will certainly not be remade to-morrow; he sees the long descent of the most novel problems; he is tolerant because he does not ask too much of humanity; but, like Malvolio, he thinks nobly of the soul, and has a modest confidence in the human reason if it keeps to rational limits. He believes with De L'Isle Adam that "*sans illusion tout p rit,*" but he must first be convinced of the honesty and the social value of illusion; and he is merciless to insincerity and pretence. He has the eighteenth century belief in society, and is always reminding us that we are not isolated creatures but members of an intricate community. Hence, like Burke, he will not destroy what many generations have built merely because some of the plaster work is shaky. To him the desert hermit and the iconoclast are equally repugnant, for the one is not a social being, and the other is the foe of society. In a word, he is the critical Conservative, as were the best Georgians. We have his own confession:

"It so happens that I dislike the seventeenth century and like the eighteenth. I do not pretend to justify my taste. Perhaps it is that there is a kind of unity and finish about the eighteenth century wanting to its predecessor. Perhaps I am prejudiced against the latter by my dislike of its religious wars, which were more than half political, and its political wars, which were more than half religious."



## HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS

No more does he like the high noon of the Victorian era:

“ I justify it [the dislike] to myself by saying that it reminds me too much of Landseer's pictures and the revival of Gothic; that I feel no sentiment of allegiance towards any of the intellectual dynasties which then held sway; that neither the thin lucidity of Mill nor the windy prophesyings of Carlyle, neither Comte nor yet Newman, were ever able to arouse in me the enthusiasm of a disciple; that I turn with pleasure from the Corn Law squabble to the Great War.”

We find the preference in his style, in his fondness for the neat antithesis and the ironic interjected sentence; in his love for Handel; in his fastidiousness, akin to the younger Pitt's; in his equal dislike of crude heresy and withered orthodoxy. His mind is the exact opposite of the “ half-baked,” which sees things in lurid flashes and unrelated visions. To his broad, lucid outlook, form, line, and proportion seem infinitely more important than colour. The temperament is revealed, again, in his distrust of high-sounding generalities and pretentious dogmas. Naturally he makes war against the half-dozen maxims to which the philosophic Radicals reduced the art of statecraft. He believes in the plain man, but is doubtful about the thing called popularity. “ No science,” he says, “ can become popular with impunity.” False rhetoric is his pet aversion, and of such is the common ecstasy of politicians:

“ They never need find difficulty [he says in his essay on “ Cobden ”] in placing their conduct in an interesting light, whatever view the public may happen to take



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of it. Are they the popular favourites? Then are they the representatives, the tribunes, of the people, and speak almost with the voice of inspiration. Does the people burn them in effigy? It is a sign and measure of the extent to which they are ahead of the public opinion of their time."

And so we have the tremendous letter on Dr. Clifford's pamphlet, in which the apocalyptic style is pilloried with, for Lord Balfour, surprising acerbity. "The ear gets wearied with their unrelenting scream; the palate jaded with their perpetual stimulants."

Such temperament means that there can be no very strong inspiration, no infectious gusto of belief. Lord Balfour is prone to a gentle pessimism. He sees no golden age in the future, and he has grave doubts of the existence of any in the past. Hope and dream, he seems to say, but if you are wise do not look for too much; the world is a bridge to pass over, not to build upon. Here is a passage which, except for a phrase or two, might have been written by Burke in one of his cosmic moralizings:

"Literary immortality is an unsubstantial fiction devised by literary artists for their own especial consolation. It means at the best an existence prolonged through an infinitesimal fraction of that infinitesimal fraction of the world's history during which man has played his part upon it. And during this fraction of a fraction, what, or rather how many things, does it mean? A work of genius begins by appealing to the hearts of men, moving their fancy, warming their imagination, entering into their inmost life. In that period immortality is still young; and life really means living. But this condition of things has never yet endured. What at first was the

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delight of nations declines by slow but inevitable gradations into the luxury, or the business, or even the vanity, of a few. What once spoke in accents understood by all is now painfully spelt out by a small band of scholars. What was once read for pleasure is now read for curiosity. It becomes 'an interesting illustration of the tastes of a bygone age,' a 'remarkable proof of such and such a theory of æsthetics.' 'It still repays perusal by those who have sufficient historic sympathy to look at it from the proper point of view,' and so on. The love of those who love it best is largely alloyed with an interest which is half antiquarian and half scientific. It is no longer Tithonus in his radiant youth, gazed at with the passion-lit eyes of Luna, but Tithonus in extremest age, reported on as a most remarkable and curious case by a committee of the Royal College of Physicians."

From such a standpoint we expect tolerance and moderation, but the moderation is of an austere kind. It is not the facile sort which halves extremes, as if one were to look for safety in sailing up a river channel by keeping equi-distant from both shores. It is of the school of Halifax the Trimmer, the moderation which is based on clear thinking, or—to continue our metaphor—which means the use of a good chart of the estuary. And here we reach one of Lord Balfour's really strong persuasions. He believes in and reverences the reason. It may not be a perfect guide, but it is all we have, and he will not consent to forgo its use. "It is true," he writes, "that without enthusiasm nothing would be done. But it is also true that without knowledge nothing would be done well." By reason he does not mean any narrow logic. It would be not unfair to call it common sense. He is content to admit



provinces of life which are unrationalized; indeed, his whole aim is to impress upon us the need for looking honestly on facts and not fitting them into the rigid bed of a theory. To think that a few dogmas will exhaust the universe is not reason, but unreason.

"Imagine [he says in his rectorial address on "Progress"] nicely adjusting our loyalty and patriotism to the standard of a calculated utility. Imagine us severally suspending our adhesion to the Ten Commandments until we have leisure and opportunity to decide between the rival and inconsistent philosophies which contend for the object of establishing them! These things we may indeed imagine if we please. Fortunately, we shall never see them. Society is founded . . . not upon criticism but upon feelings and beliefs, and upon the customs and codes by which feelings and beliefs are, as it were, fixed and rendered stable."

Reason is common sense, a wise appreciation of the working rules of human society, the free play of the intellect, indeed, but an intellect which can understand the intractable subject-matter it works with.

His second strong persuasion is of the value of our common human instincts, of the ordinary consciousness of the plain man. It used to be the fashion to regard Lord Balfour as an aristocratic dilettante, dwelling retired with a rarefied metaphysic. But the whole trend of his writings is towards the exaltation of the simple, practical soul. If we were to seek one word to describe his quality, it would be "humanism," eighteenth century humanism, with no very roseate dreams about humanity, but a profound consciousness of



its homely worth and homely wisdom. His enthusiasm, such as it is, is for what is practicable, for the business of carrying on the work of the world, and his hero is the man who is willing to take a hand.

## II

His philosophy, as we should expect, has none of the far-stretching raptures of the metaphysician. Not for him the great all-inclusive world-philosophies, which satisfy that hunger and vague longing which, as he has told us, the music of his favourite Handel does *not* satisfy. He seeks a more homely speculative faith, something a little less chilling to common human blood than the thin air of the Hegelian Infinite. His standpoint throughout is curiously business-like. Science, he argues, rests upon many unprovable postulates, which we accept, not for their logic, but because of their "values." Why not grant the same privilege to speculations which look beyond the material world? He offers us no system, but only a suggestion towards a provisional explanation—an explanation, be it noted, not so much of things themselves as of our modes of thought.

Here as always Lord Balfour is a humanist. When he first became interested in these questions, the prevailing school was the naturalism of Mill and Spencer; and in his first book he vigorously attacked its unwarrantable assumptions and the many gaps in its logical equipment. The fashion changed, German idealism became the vogue; and though it found Lord Balfour more sympathetic, it did not find him a convert. Now

the wheel has moved again, and the popular creed, in the hands of the various schools of realists and Bergsonians, is something not unlike what Lord Balfour has always been saying. In his essay on "Berkeley" he tells us that it is essential for the philosopher to possess "the instinct which tells him where, along the line of contemporary speculation, that point is to be found from which the next advance may best be made." He has shown this instinct in a remarkable degree, and his channel of thought, which forty years ago was a backwater, is now perhaps the main stream. He is content with the ordinary consciousness, the ordinary hopes and beliefs of mankind. When clever people try to demolish the plain man's creed, he takes up cudgels in its defence. Why? Because these beliefs work, he replies; because they give hope and comfort and joy, and until you have something better to take their place they must stand. It is no answer to say that they are not always logically demonstrable. No more are the beliefs of science, not perhaps so much; and he proceeds to find appalling gaps in the logic of the proud naturalists. To-day the men of science concur, and it is the greatest of them, like the late Henri Poincaré, who are most willing to point out the gaps. Faith is to be defended, because science is also largely an act of faith; religious belief, because its critics, on their own postulates, are constantly believing.

Such a position is sceptical, but it is sceptical chiefly of conventional scepticism. It is critical, but always with a conservative purpose. Lord Balfour approaches the world of simple faiths with a profound reverence. He will not heedlessly



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disturb them. As Mr. Wilfrid Ward (I think) once said, he is on the side of the angels, for where fools rush in he fears to tread. He is always a man of action in thought, with a keen eye to practical values. This is not to say that he is in any way of the Pragmatists' school. He is too critical of logical hiatuses and a ragged metaphysic; and the alluring fancies of M. Bergson, with whom he has many affinities, find in him a friendly but a trenchant critic. No school can claim him with justice; he remains a detached mind, clearly perceiving practical utilities, admitting many a breakdown in proof, but declining to accept iconoclasm until the iconoclasts make out a better case. He has that rare combination, a real earnestness and a thorough-going scepticism.

Three doubters, it is said, do not equal one believer; but Lord Balfour is no ordinary doubter. He is both believer and doubter, and his doubts are exercised chiefly against the foes of belief. Speculatively, it is true, such a position has many difficulties. Its importance is chiefly negative, it does not establish any reasoned foundation of belief, and inclines to be conservative rather than constructive. Its merit lies in the fact that it clears the air and defines and delimits with much acumen the exact nature of a problem which it leaves for later and more fortunate philosophers to solve. All this is done in a philosophic style, which in its own way is very nearly perfect. Lucidity never fails him, and his subtlety is the result of a line of thought so completely realized in his own mind that it is apt to deceive the reader by its simplicity. We shall not find in him the poetry of the great system-makers, the sudden



high visions of Plato and Spinoza and Hegel. He is never *exalté*; his metaphors are never grandiose: he builds no cloudy cities. But for the lover of exact thinking there is a rare beauty in his orderly argument and the perfect aptness of his illustrations, and there is a tonic vigour in his strong sceptical sincerity.

## III

His purely literary merits are to be found principally in his style. Questions of æsthetics interest him deeply, and in his "Handel," and especially in his Romanes lecture, he has done something to orientate the ordinary critical stand-points. But his style is so distinctive and possesses virtues so uncommon in these high-coloured days that it is worth a little consideration. Formally it is far from perfect. He can commit on occasion almost every grammatical fault except the split infinitive, and his misuse of "and which" almost rivals Thackeray's. His manner is what our forefathers would have called "well-bred"; that is, it has generally a conversational pitch, and hardens at intervals into a delicate eighteenth century formalism, and above all it is exactly adequate to its substance. Its great quality is its logic, which interpenetrates the sequence of sentences, the choice of illustrations, the selection of epithets. Hence while his writing is often chilly, and sometimes a little thin, it is always restful and satisfying. It is unsatisfactory only to those who ask a satisfaction that is foreign to his purpose.

"Argument is all I have to offer," he tells us in his *Philosophic Doubt*, but there can be a real

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æsthetic beauty in mere argument in the hands of a master. This is best seen by his use of illustrations, which are at once graceful and mathematically exact:

“ Do they follow, I mean, on reason *qua* reason, or are they like a schoolboy's tears over a proposition in Euclid, consequences of reasoning, but not conclusions from it? ”

“ The right of any individual to judge for himself is like the right of any man who possesses a balance at the bankers to require its immediate payment in sovereigns. The right may be undoubted, but it can only be safely enjoyed on condition that too many persons do not take it into their heads to exercise it together.”

Generally the illustrations are more or less tinged with irony:

“ The science [of sociology] has been planned out by some very able philosophers, much as a prospective watering-place is planned out by a speculative builder.”

“ The cultivation of emotions at high tension towards humanity, deliberately dissociated from the cultivation of religious feeling towards God, has never yet been practised on a large scale. We have so far had only laboratory experiments. There has been no attempt to manufacture in bulk.”

Observe the *esprit malin* of these scientific and commercial phrases.

“ There are those, again, who reject in its ordinary shape the idea of Divine superintendence, but who conceive that they can escape from philosophic reproach by beating out the idea yet a little thinner, and admitting that there does exist somewhere a ‘ power which makes for righteousness.’ ”



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The ironic interjected sentence is a favourite mannerism.

"Though not, so far as appears, a very profound political economist himself, he [Cobden] was of opinion that political economy was more difficult of apprehension than any of the 'exact sciences.' Which of the exact sciences he had mastered (unless phrenology be one) Mr. Morley does not, so far as I recollect, inform us."

Sometimes, in his more controversial work, the irony ceases to be delicate and becomes vigorous satire. The masterpiece of this form is the famous letter on Dr. Clifford's pamphlet. Why, he asks, should conscience forbid the payment of rates towards denominational schools and yet permit the payment of taxes?

"Is there not a certain over-subtlety of distinction in this ruling, which, if I may say so without offence either to Dr. Clifford or the Jesuits, is almost Jesuitical? Can we seriously believe in the pre-established correspondence between the frontier which eternally separates right from wrong, and the transient line which technically distinguishes local from national taxation?"

There is the rapier; here is the broadsword:

"It [the Bible] is apparently to be treated as a collection of elegant extracts and edifying maxims. The sixth Commandment may be taught, for, taken by itself, it is simply a moral pronouncement. The first Commandment, on the other hand, must be treated only as 'literature'; for manifestly it has a theological implication. Of the two precepts which contain 'all the Law and the Prophets,' the second may be taught, but not the first. The Lord's Prayer may be used as an introduction to



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Burns, but not as the outpouring of the spirit of man to his Maker. According to Dr. Clifford, Parliament would be going beyond its functions in teaching, at the cost of public funds, that man *has* a Maker."

For the more coloured graces of style we need scarcely look. But there are moments when, in Plato's phrase, the quest of truth does not lack the warmth of desire, and the writing takes on a sober sheen, and even kindles into something like eloquence. Such a passage is to be found at the close of "The Religion of Humanity":

"The 'religion of humanity' seems specially fitted to meet the tastes of that comparatively small and prosperous class, who are unwilling to leave the dry bones of Agnosticism wholly unclothed with any living tissue of religious emotion, and who are at the same time fortunate enough to be able to persuade themselves that they are contributing, or may contribute, by their individual efforts to the attainment of some great ideal for mankind. But what has it to say to the more obscure multitude who are absorbed, and well-nigh overwhelmed, in the constant struggle with daily needs and narrow cares; who have but little leisure or inclination to consider the precise rôle they are called on to play in the great drama of 'humanity,' and who might in any case be puzzled to discover its interest or its importance? Can it assure them that there is no human being so insignificant as not to be of infinite worth in the eyes of Him who created the Heavens, or so feeble but that his actions may have consequences of infinite moment long after this material system shall have crumbled into nothingness? Does it offer consolation to those who are in grief, hope to those who are bereaved, strength to the weak, forgiveness to the sinful, rest to those who are weary and heavy laden? If not, then, whatever be its merits, it is

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no rival to Christianity. It cannot penetrate and vivify the inmost life of ordinary humanity. There is in it no nourishment for ordinary human souls, no comfort for ordinary human sorrow, no help for ordinary human weakness. Not less than the crudest irreligion does it leave us men divorced from all communion with God, face to face with the unthinking energies of nature which gave us birth, and into which, if supernatural religion indeed be a dream, we must after a few fruitless struggles be again dissolved."

There is reason for the view that Lord Balfour at his best writes the purest prose of our generation, the prose most in consonance with the special qualities of our speech. A different style is in fashion to-day. The startling word, the haunting phrase, the impassioned epithet are more generally acclaimed. But it may be argued that in the best prose there should be a certain formalism, that clarity should be crystalline rather than watery, and that, in the prose of argument at any rate, perfect aptness and coherence are qualities more valuable and certainly rarer than flowers and tears. To those who share this view there will always be a peculiar attraction in the dry purity of Lord Balfour's writing.

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IV

TWO ORDEALS OF  
DEMOCRACY

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## TWO ORDEALS OF DEMOCRACY<sup>1</sup>

I COUNT IT A HIGH PRIVILEGE TO BE WITH YOU HERE to-day. You are permitting me to share in the commemoration of your dead, and by so doing you are treating a stranger as a kinsman. A memorial such as yours must be more than a mere record of a gallant adventure and a costly sacrifice. It is there before the eyes of the generations as a perpetual reminder of a path which to some degree every young man can travel, the path of duty and courage and devotion; and it is a reminder, too, that history is a continuous thing—that past, present, and future are in a true sense indivisible, that we enter upon a heritage bequeathed by others, and that in our turn we hand on a potent legacy to those who follow after.

I am honoured, deeply honoured, by your invitation, and I can best show my sense of that honour by claiming the right of an intimate friend and speaking to you not of my own country, but of yours. The Great War, which we are here to commemorate, made us for a time one household. I propose to exercise my privilege as a member of that household by giving you an Englishman's

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered on the Alumni War Memorial Foundation at Milton Academy, Massachusetts, October 16, 1924.



reading of one page, perhaps the greatest page, of your national life. My object is to illustrate the continuity of history. I want you to realize how, half a century before the Great War, you in America faced most of its problems and brilliantly solved them. There was a time after your Civil War when America seemed to do her best to forget it. Old warriors met in clubs and corners to fight their battles over again, but for many years there was little popular interest in the matter. Am I wrong in partially attributing the change in this attitude to the publication by an Englishman, Colonel Henderson, of his classic life of Stonewall Jackson? To us in Britain, and especially to British soldiers, the subject never lost its attraction, and it was well for us that, when German staff officers regarded it as a mere squabble of amateurs, and devoted their attention to their own barren campaign of 1870, our Staff College for two generations made a careful study of the battles of North and South. I cannot claim that during your ordeal my country always behaved either with sympathy or with discretion, but I can claim that we were always alive to its tremendous importance. I have an uncle still living, an old general of eighty-two, who, as a very young officer in our Life Guards, managed by some nefarious means to escape from his duties and to ride with Sheridan.

It is a habit of a great invention to supersede its predecessors, and only the antiquary concerns himself now with the first embryonic steam-engine or the clumsy early flying-machines. In the same way, the war which ended six years ago may be said to have superseded, so far as military interest goes, the campaigns of the nineteenth and the

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early twentieth centuries. But there is one exception. It cannot supersede your own Civil War, for in the four years' struggle, as I see it, all the main strategic and tactical developments of the Great War were foreshadowed. Its scale may have been small, but we must not confuse scale with kind, and its quality was transcendent. Moreover, it was a conflict of great men, leaders of the heroic stamp. Again, it was a clash of honest ideals—half-truths, or otherwise there would have been no clash, but ideals, each in itself reasonable, and each forming the highest allegiance for those who had been brought up under a particular kind of tradition. Again, because each side stood for no mean cause, it was one of the cleanest and most chivalrous, as well as one of the most heroic, campaigns ever fought. Finally, for the lover of romance and the student of human nature I do not know where you will find a richer harvest. It was singularly free from military formalism, and its story is a succession of strange and moving pictures:—Jeb Stuart and his men flitting like ghosts through the forests with their hats garlanded with flowers; the charge at Chattanooga silhouetted against the harvest moon; Leonidas Polk, the last of the warrior bishops, baptizing on the eve of battle his fellow generals in a mess tent out of a tin dish by the light of a tallow candle; the eve of Chancellorsville, when in the quiet twilight the rush of birds and deer from the woods first told the Northern army that Jackson was on their rear.



## I

He would be a bold man who would set down glibly in a sentence or two the cause of the Great War. The proximate causes are clear enough—the nervousness of Austria, the ambition of Germany—but for the true and ultimate causes you must dig deep into the history of the last century. It was the same with your Civil War, as it has been the same with all wars. The proximate cause was slavery, but the roots of strife lay deeper. The truth is that in America before 1862 there were two societies not yet integrated. Both North and South would have subscribed to the general principles of what we call a “democratic” creed: representative government, the rule of the majority, and so forth. Both accepted the Constitution of the United States, but in reading that Constitution they put the emphasis differently. To the South the vital thing, the thing with which all its affections and sentiments were intertwined, was the State. The North, on the other hand, had for its main conception the larger civic organism, the Nation. Hence, if a difference of opinion arose between a State or a group of States and the rest, the Southerner would think naturally of secession; under secession the sacrosanctity of the State, the civic unit about which he cared, remained intact. To the Northerner the secession of a State or States seemed treason to that larger unit, the Nation, to which his loyalty was owed. There, roughly, you get a very real difference of outlook, due to a variety of historic and social causes. But it was a difference of emphasis rather than of principle,



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and I think it might fairly be said that each represented a half-truth. There is no real inconsistency between a sovereign Nation and a self-contained and locally autonomous State. In 1862 the wisest Southerners, if pressed, would have agreed on the importance of the national conception, and the wisest Northerners on the necessity of preserving a vigorous individual State life.

But now came in the question of slavery, with which were involved all kinds of economic interests which cloud a man's reason. The wisest Southerners disliked the system and looked forward to its gradual disappearance, and the wisest Northerners had no desire to abolish slavery there and then and fling the South into bankruptcy. But since the matter touched the livelihood of many, passions were excited, and on both sides intolerance increased, so that presently what was merely a question of policy became a dogma, and this dogma grew more arrogant as the argument progressed. So very soon we find the sovereignty of the State being exalted in the South as the first object of the citizens' loyalty. From this the right to secede logically followed, and on that the issue was joined.

We can see the stages in the growth of the dispute in the career of Lincoln. Long before he was President he had been a vigorous opponent of slavery, but he was very unlike the extremer abolitionists, and on the question of slavery alone he would not have entered into the war. He fought first and last for the integrity of the Nation. You remember his famous letter to Horace Greeley in which he wrote: "I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way

under the Constitution. . . . If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would do that." But Lincoln also saw that slavery would force on war by exacerbating men's feelings, and might drive them to transform a difference of emphasis into a difference of principle.

When, on February 11, 1861, he left his home for Washington to become President of the United States, after borrowing money—for he was very poor—to pay the expenses of his early months at the White House, he had one of the most difficult decisions to make that ever fell to the lot of mortal man. He had to decide at once, for Fort Sumter was besieged. If he reinforced or provisioned it, war with the South would follow; if he left it alone he surrendered tamely a piece of national property of which he was the trustee, and assented on behalf of the American nation to the dictatorship of a section. Let us examine these difficulties, for only thus can we get the measure of the greatness of the man.

He was a President elected by a minority vote. It is certain that there was no majority in his favour in the United States, and it is by no means certain that there was a clear majority for him even in his own party. He was a country lawyer with little experience of men and cities, self-educated, uncouth in manner and appearance, utterly unfamiliar with the details of government. No one of the members of his Cabinet but considered himself far his superior in ability, and most lost no opportunity of making this plain to him in



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public and private. He was the most pacific of men, tender-hearted to a fault, and from the Indian campaign of his youth he had learned a deep horror of war. The war which he was contemplating was the most terrible of all struggles—a strife between kinsmen. For what was he going to fight? For Democracy? But the Southerners were democrats and were using his own phrases against him. They declared that they fought for the free development of their own specialized society against outside dictation. It was very easy to turn the ordinary democratic shibboleths in favour of secession. He had no army to speak of, and the best soldiers had cast in their lot with the South. General Scott, the Northern commander, had given it as his opinion that Fort Sumter should be evacuated and "the wayward sisters allowed to go in peace." The Northern abolitionists told him that he could never raise an army. Wendell Phillips declared: "You cannot go through Massachusetts and recruit men to bombard Charleston or New Orleans." Remember Lincoln was no fire-eater. He was exceedingly cautious and diplomatic, as was shown in all his electioneering campaigns and in the way in which he angled for the allegiance of the border States, declaring that "he hoped to have the Almighty on his side, but he must have Kentucky." But no diplomacy availed him now. He had to decide yes or no, and yes meant inevitably war.

What could he hope to win by war? A hundred years before, Chatham had said: "Conquer a free population of three million souls? The thing is impossible," and the phrase had become an axiom in politics. If war came he would be-



confronted with five and a half million people in deadly earnest, with three and a half million slaves behind them to grow food while the men took the field. Could even victory, the most sweeping victory, bring these men back into the national fold? The difficulties were so deeply felt by his colleagues that we find Seward, his Secretary of State, proposing seriously to relinquish Fort Sumter, to attempt to get slavery out of the question altogether, and to try to fake up a quarrel with Spain and France over Mexico, in order to unite the nation. To such casuistry Lincoln replied that the issue before him was union or disunion and that Fort Sumter lay at the heart of it. But the incident showed how deep was the confusion into which even brave, clear-headed, and public-spirited men had fallen. Lincoln, in deciding, had to stand alone.

He decided for war, and I think that decision one of the most courageous acts in all history. He had no illusions about the coming conflict. He believed that it would be a long war and a bloody war, and he saw no light at the end of it. But, with that noble fatalism which is a source of weakness in fools but of inspiration in the great, he felt that God had mysteriously guided his steps to this desperate brink, and that the leap was ordained of Heaven. In his slow, patient way he reasoned it out and could reach but the one conclusion. He fought for the Nation and the integrity of the historic state, the sacrosanctity of the work of the great men who had built it in the past. He believed that such a fabric is a trust which men weaken to their own undoing. If we look for Lincoln's creed in its simplest form, we

shall find it in a private conversation at that time recorded by John Hay. "For my own part," he said, "I consider the central idea prevailing in this struggle is the necessity upon us of proving that popular government is not an absurdity. We must settle this question now, whether, in a free government, the minority have the right to break up the government whenever they choose. If we fail, it will go far to prove the incapability of the people to govern themselves." Lincoln fought to prevent Democracy making a fool of itself, and if that noble but most brittle type of polity is to be preserved to the world, we have not done with the fight. To most of his colleagues it seemed a mere debating issue, an absurdly narrow ground on which to plunge the nation into war; but I am inclined to think that every great decision in history has been taken on a fine point. The foothold may be narrow, but if it be of granite it will suffice.

I pause, gentlemen, to remind you, if you will permit me, that in the great crises of life every man must stand alone, as much alone as at the moment of death. No friend or wife, no parent or child, can share that austere responsibility. The controversy is within his own soul, or, to put it in the language of theology, it is between himself and his Maker. His only consultant must be the valour of his heart. It is so in the history of war, from the day when Cæsar crossed the little stream called the Rubicon, which the Roman constitution forbade the Pro-Consul of Gaul to pass, to that day in September 1918, when Sir Douglas Haig decided to play the great game, and, in spite of the doubts of his colleagues and the hesitation of



his own Government, flung his armies against the Siegfried Line and went through it as through blotting-paper. Generals and statesmen are called upon to make those tremendous decisions, and according to the result they are judged by the tribunal of history. But, as you advance in life, no one of you will escape the same necessity, though your decisions may not affect the fate of empires. You will be called upon some day to face situations in public or private life where you have to choose between two ways—the right and the wrong, the hard road and the easy, the long game and the short game—and you will have to choose alone. You will find plenty of excellent arguments for the second best, for slackness, for shirking, but if you are wise you will be chary of listening to those soft and facile monitors. For, though peace and quiet are good things to be earnestly pursued, the best kind of peace and quiet is that which reigns in a man's soul.

## II

Great enterprises fall into two parts—the preliminary spiritual conflict, and the task of translating spirit into matter—or, to put it into the words traditionally ascribed to Cromwell, first the trust in God and then the laborious job of keeping your powder dry. We have seen how Lincoln achieved the first; let us now consider how he faced the second. If the war was not to be fought in vain he must win a complete and final victory, for no drawn battle would suffice. Now, the North began with all the advantages but two. She had a population of twenty-two millions against nine.



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She had the great industries, the mineral fields, the shipbuilding yards. She had all the navy there was. She had far greater wealth, and was not only far more self-supporting, but owing to her ships she could import what she did not produce from overseas. She had all the rank and file of the regular army and four-fifths of the officers. The South, on the other hand, had few industries and few ships. She was mainly agricultural, a land of big estates worked by negro slaves. She was poor in the sense that if driven back upon herself she had within her borders only a limited number of the necessities of life and war. But the South had two advantages which made her triumphant in the first stages and at one moment nearly gave her the victory. The first was that her aristocratic squirearchy was better fitted for a military organization than the Northern democracy. The great majority of her citizens were country folk who could march and shoot, and she was a nation of horsemen and horse-masters. Obviously, such a people, if armies have to be improvised, have less to learn than men who come from a different kind of environment. The advantage is, of course, terminable; it is very real at the start, but it lessens as the enemy begins to learn his job. In the second place it was the fortune of the South to have fighting on her side by far the abler generals. Lee and Stonewall Jackson have had few superiors in the art of war. The North produced many competent soldiers—Grant, Thomas, Sherman, Sheridan, Schofield—but no one of them reaches the small and select brotherhood of the greatest captains. On the other hand, if, taking the whole of history, you limit that

brotherhood to no more than six names, you must include Lee.

Now, wars are won by superior strength—by weight of numbers, if the numbers are properly trained and supplied. Military history shows no real exception to this maxim. A splendid genius or some extraordinary initial advantage may give to the weaker side an immediate victory, which paralyses and disintegrates the enemy; but if the enemy refuses to be paralysed, if he insists on fighting on, if he develops a stubborn defensive, if he learns his lessons, and if he has greater resources than his antagonist, in the end he will win. Against material preponderance, if it be wisely handled, the most wonderful generalship will beat ineffectual wings. Hannibal, in the long run, was worn down by the lesser Scipio. Napoleon fell before the accumulated weight of his opponents. But—and it is a vital proviso—the nation which is strongest in material and human resources must learn how to use them. Until it learns to use them it will go on being beaten. The problem of the North was exactly the problem of the Allies in 1914. She had to assemble her greater man-power. She had to train it. She had to find a commander-in-chief who could use it reasonably well. She had to discover how her greater wealth could be best applied to cripple her adversary. It took her four years to understand these things, and when she understood them she won.

Lincoln, as a war minister, had everything to learn. He had no natural aptitude for the post except an iron courage, but he had that complete intellectual honesty which can look clearly at facts,



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even unwelcome facts. Let us see how he faced his problem.

I. His first business was to raise the men. He had about 18,000 regulars, most of them serving on the Western frontier, and he had four-fifths of the regular officers. A good many of these officers had had experience in the Mexican War fourteen years before. The President showed how little he appreciated the nature of the coming conflict by asking for only 75,000 volunteers, and these to serve for only three months. Then came the first engagement at Bull Run, which opened his eyes. He was empowered by Congress to raise 500,000 volunteers for three years' service, and a little later the number was increased to 1,000,000. Recruits came in magnificently. If we remember the population of the North I think we must rank the effort as among the most remarkable ever made by a system of volunteer enlistment. Lincoln began by asking for 600,000, and he got 700,000. After Fredericksburg he asked for 300,000, and he got 430,000. Then he asked for another 300,000, of which each State should provide its quota; but he only got 87,000, a little more than a quarter of his demands. Meantime the South for many years had adopted conscription. It was now a year and a half since the first battle, and the campaign had entered on that period of drag which was the time of blackest depression in the North.

Then Lincoln took the decisive step. The North was, I suppose, of all parts of the world at the moment that in which the idea of individual liberty was most deeply implanted. She was a country which had always gloried in being unmilitary, in



contrast with the effete monarchies of Europe. The Constitution had been so framed as to be extraordinarily tender to individual rights. The press was unbridled, and the press was very powerful. The land, too, was full of philosophic idealists who preferred dogmas to facts, and were vocal in the papers and on the platforms. Moreover, there was a general election coming on, and since the war had gone badly there was a good chance that Lincoln might be defeated if he in any way added to his unpopularity. There were not wanting men—some of them very able and distinguished men—who declared that it was far better to lose the war than to win it by transgressing one article of the current political faith. There were others, Lincoln's own friends and advisers, who warned him solemnly that no hint of compulsion would ever be tolerated by free-born Americans, and that if he dared to propose the thing he would have an internal revolution to add to his other troubles. Again and again he was told that the true friends of the enemy were the compulsionists, an argument we were very familiar with in England nine years ago. You must remember, too, that Lincoln was in the fullest sense of the word a democratic statesman, believing that government must not only be *for* the people but *by* the people. When he was faced by the necessity of finding some other way of raising men than as volunteers, he was faced with the task of jettisoning—I will not say the principles, for principles are tougher things—but all the sentiments and traditions of his political life.

But Lincoln was a very great man, and he believed that it was the business of a statesman to

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lead the people—to act, to initiate policy, and not to wait like a dumb lackey in the ante-chamber of his masters. He knew that politics were not an abstract dogma, but a working code based upon facts. He knew also that in a crisis it is wisest to grasp the nettle. He saw the magnitude of the crisis, that it was a question of life or death, whatever journalists and demagogues might say. So on March 3, 1863, a law was passed to raise armies by conscription. He answered those who met him with the famous "thin-edge-of-the-wedge" argument in words which should be remembered: that "he did not believe that a man could contract so strong a taste for emetics during a temporary illness as to insist upon feeding upon them during the remainder of a healthy life." At the start there was some resistance, but in a little the good sense of the country prevailed. It was one of the two greatest acts of Lincoln's life, and, like all great acts of courage, it had its reward. Four months later Gettysburg was fought, Vicksburg surrendered to Grant, and the tide turned. The North recruited from first to last some three millions out of a population of twenty millions. The men had been found, the human resources of the North were fully mobilized, and two years after the passing of the act came that April day when Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox.

II. We come now to the second problem. Mere numbers are not enough unless they are trained and disciplined for war. The North drew by far the greater part of her armies from men who had been engaged in civil life. Let us see how she shaped them.

The armies of both North and South were



amateurs, with a small sprinkling of trained officers. I have said that numbers always win, but they must be disciplined numbers. Hordes, however large, will generally be beaten. The North began her campaign with a theory which is very common in popularly governed nations which have had no military experience. She was against all hard-and-fast discipline. The men should serve willingly, because the orders appealed to their intelligence and not because they were given by a commanding officer. The argument ran something like this: "An order understood and willingly obeyed is far better than an order blindly complied with. Officers must therefore carry their men with them, persuade them, humour them, so that all ranks may have the enthusiasm of willing service. Only thus can you have a democratic army."

On this one may remark that the result might be democratic, but it could not possibly be an army. And I do not think it was democratic either, if we understand democracy aright. Democracy as the most living and organic form of government should be also the most elastic, and the most able to adapt itself to the unforeseen facts of a situation. This does not mean that you are to establish a cut-and-dried military hierarchy and to govern only by fear. If any of you have ever marched in peace time with French infantry, such as the Chasseurs Alpains, you probably have been amazed, as I have been, at what seemed the lack of discipline. The men chaffed their officers and addressed them by nicknames, and at night you could see an officer and a private playing chess together outside the café door. Yes, but in time



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of war that was all changed. The men and officers were still the best of friends, but there was a rigid discipline, the more rigid inasmuch as it came from below. It was the will of the men themselves, who recognized wherein lay victory and security. I call that army a democratic army. I call the Allied Armies, as we knew them six years ago, democratic armies. But the forces of the North during the first stages of the Civil War were neither democratic nor an army.

It took a long time to drive out of men's heads the idea that an order was only to be obeyed when it commended itself to the private soldier's mind. At first officers were elected by the votes of the rank and file, and a very mixed lot they were. For one good man produced in this way there were twenty plausible incompetents. The bonds of discipline were loose, and, though the world has never seen more patriotic and intelligent troops, patriotism and intelligence alone were not enough. The result of the Northern system was that many vices developed which made them an easy prey to Lee and Jackson. An undisciplined army lacks mobility, and so Jackson could do what he pleased with Pope and Hooker. A lack of discipline means straggling, and no Northern general could be certain how much of his force would turn up at a given place at a given time. Moreover, outpost duties were scamped, and the result was a series of costly surprises. In the battle itself fire discipline was bad, and half the strength was expended in the air. There was the same lack of order all through the army. If a brigadier thought himself slighted, he posted off to Washington to intrigue in Congress, and instead of being tried by court

martial and shot as a deserter he was more often than not promoted.

But the North learned her lesson, though the learning was bitter. If you will study that admirable compilation *The Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, you will see how the best American officers faced the task of securing the highest discipline without impairing enthusiasm or crushing individual intelligence. The time came at last when Lincoln found the right Commander-in-Chief and gave him his undivided trust. Grant was not the man to stand insubordination, and he produced the kind of instrument that was needed. Never has a human instrument been more cruelly tried. The desperate losses in the Wilderness of Virginia would have broken the heart of most armies; they would have utterly destroyed the original armies of the first months of war. But the weapon had been forged and tempered and it did not break. The North had grasped the nature of her problem. She had not only assembled her man-power but she had trained it, and both numbers and training were essential to victory.

III. We reach the third problem. The North found the men; after many months she found out the way to train them; she had also to find the right kind of leadership. Strength, even disciplined strength, is not enough.

Lincoln, as I have said, began the war without any kind of aptitude or experience. His Cabinet was in the same position. It contained three able men—Seward, Chase, and Stanton—and of these the ablest, Stanton, did his best at first to make it impossible for the President to continue in office. Unfortunately, the North had no generals of such



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commanding and proven ability that they could be blindly trusted. Besides, the President of the United States is the chief executive officer of the country, and Lincoln, whether he wanted to or not, had to assume the direction of the war.

We sometimes talk lightly as if the only thing in war was to find a good general and give him a free hand. But in a modern war, in which the existence of the nation is at stake, the matter is not nearly so simple. To beat the enemy you have not only to win field victories; or, rather, to win the right kind of field victory you must do more than turn out good troops and able generals. You have to use the whole national strength, military, naval, and economic, and therefore, unless the great soldier is also a great statesman like Napoleon, the supreme direction of a campaign must lie in the hands of a civil Cabinet. That is to say, the Cabinet decides upon the main strategic plan, which involves all kinds of questions of policy, and, having so decided, it chooses the best men it can find to carry out the military and naval parts. Once these commanders have been chosen, they should not be interfered with. Until they have failed, they should be trusted.

Now, to discover and apply a continuous strategic policy you need a Cabinet loyal within itself, and it must be instructed by the best expert advice that can be secured. Lincoln had a Cabinet which, to begin with at least, was indifferently loyal. Its members all wanted to beat the South, but they all thought that they could do the job better than the President. That was bad enough, but in addition there was Congress, which possessed an amazing number of advertising



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mountebanks who did their best to hamper the Government. You remember Artemus Ward's comment on them. He observed that at the last election he had deliberately voted for Henry Clay. It was true, he said, that Henry was dead, but since all the politicians that he knew were fifteenth-rate he preferred to vote for a first-class corpse. Then there was the press, which was quite uncensored and of which a large part spent its time in futile criticism of generals and statesmen and in insisting upon policies which would have given the enemy a speedy and complete victory. It was always trying to make journalistic reputations for generals and so foist them upon the Government. But, worst of all, there was no expert body to advise the Cabinet. There was no General Staff at Washington. The capable soldiers were all in the field. There had never been any real staff in peace time, and it was impossible to improvise one rapidly in war. Hence Lincoln had to conduct the campaign himself, with little assistance from his colleagues, with no help from Congress—very much the other way—with no real military experts at his elbow, and under a perpetual cross-fire of newspaper criticism.

The result might have been foreseen. The first Northern generals were appointed largely because of political and journalistic clamour; indeed it is difficult to see how they could have been appointed in any other way, for there were no real formed reputations; the good men had still to discover themselves. General after general failed and was recalled. Transient and protesting phantoms, they flit over the page of history. There was one man of real ability, McClellan, whose difficulties

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and achievements have not, I think, received full justice. There were competent soldiers like Meade; there were others, unfortunate or incompetent, like Burnside and Hooker, Pope and Banks. Lee used to complain in his gentle way that the North always dismissed its generals just as he was getting to know and like them. They usually began with flamboyant proclamations about how they were going to whip the rebels in a month, and then they were hunted from pillar to post by Lee and Jackson. Pope, for example, announced when he took command that his headquarters would be in the saddle; on which someone observed dryly that that would be a more proper place for his hindquarters. The chief army of the North, the Army of the Potomac, was commanded by no less than six generals, and all but one were dismissed for failure. But while these honest people were degraded, all kinds of incompetents who had strong political interest were retained in their commands. Many of the Northern generals had one leg in camp and the other in Congress. It reminds one of those armies of seventeenth century Scotland which were directed by the General Assembly and were soundly beaten by Montrose.

Lincoln showed his greatness by living through that awful period and not losing his courage. Gradually he brought Congress to heel. Gradually he dominated his colleagues. Gradually he purged the army of political influence. Above all, as the war advanced, he made a zealous search for military capacity. He has been much blamed for interfering with his generals during the earlier campaigns, and the charge is just; but he was in



an almost hopeless position. He had the howling politicians behind him, and before him commanders who showed no real grasp of the situation; he conceived it his duty to interfere, and he interfered often foolishly, for he was still learning his job. But by-and-by he discovered the true soldiers—men who had fought their way up by sheer ability—men like Hancock and Thomas, Sherman and Sheridan. Above all, he discovered Grant.

There can be few romances in military history more striking than the rise of Grant. At the beginning the North had cried out for brilliant generals, people who made fine speeches, people who could be hailed as "young Napoleons." But the Napoleons and the silver-tongues vanished into obscurity, and the North found its salvation in a rough little homely man from the West, who had done well in the Mexican War, but had failed since in every business he had undertaken, and had become a by-word in his family for unsucccess. He never spoke an unnecessary word. He was uncouth in manner, untidy in person, and unprepossessing in appearance, but he was a true leader of men. There were rumours about his habits, and the Pharisees of the North cried out against appointing a drunkard to command the army, declaring that no blessing could go with such a man. Lincoln, you remember, replied by asking what was Grant's favourite brand of whisky that he might send a cask of it to his other generals. I do not think that Grant stands in the very front rank of the world's soldiers, but he was the man for the task before him. He had iron nerve, iron patience, and an iron grip of the fundamentals of



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the case. Lincoln interfered with the earlier commanders, but he did not interfere with Grant. He knew a man when he saw him.

IV. Grant was the man for the task because he could apply the strategic scheme which the situation required. What was that scheme? In its elements it was very simple, and in substance it was the same as that of the Allies in the Great War. The Southern States formed a rough quadrilateral bounded by the Potomac, the Mississippi, and the sea. One great Confederate State, Texas, lay west of the Mississippi, and North-west Virginia ran up in a long peninsula towards Lake Erie, so that it left an isthmus only one hundred miles wide between the two parts of the North. The first thing was to occupy and hold North-west Virginia, which was done with little trouble. The next was to blockade all the sea coast and prevent oversea imports from reaching the South. The next was to control the Mississippi line, and so not only cut off Texas from the Confederacy but complete the investment of the quadrilateral. After that the sides of the quadrilateral could be pushed in, so that the armies of Lee would be left with less and less ground for manœuvre and supply.

The North was perfectly conscious from the first where her strength lay and what must be the main lines of her strategy. Strategy depends upon geography, and geographical facts cannot be blinked. But in the use of her strength she fumbled for many long days. Strength in war, remember, is not a thing which can be said to exist in the abstract. There may be a potentiality of strength, but till the strength is made actual it is no better than weakness. A country may have

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an enormous population, but unless that population appears in the shape of trained armies in the right place it is not an element of strength. It may have great wealth, but unless that wealth is used skilfully for the purposes of war it is not strength. The North had the potentiality of strength, but she had to find out how to use it.

One part of the problem was successfully faced from the first. The navy was well handled, and the whole coast-line of the South was rigorously blockaded. That must be set down to the credit of the civilians at Washington. Lincoln broke away from many of the accepted practices of international law, and he and the Supreme Court created precedents which were of great use to the Allies in the late war. The result was that the South was pinched from the first and very soon began to starve. Prices went up to a crazy height. Before the end of the war, coffee sold at forty dollars a pound, and tea at thirty dollars. You could not dine in an hotel under twenty dollars, a newspaper cost a dollar, a pair of boots cost two hundred dollars. Moreover, nearly all the materials of war came from abroad, and if it had not been that the arsenals of the South were well supplied at the start and that great quantities of munitions were captured from the North in the first victories, Lee must very soon have come to a standstill through sheer lack of material. That part of the Northern strength was well applied.

But it was not enough. The South had to be beaten in the field, and it was there that the North fumbled. The main strategic objective was clear, but it is one thing to have a clear strategical objective and quite another to have a clear strategical



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plan. The two objects to be aimed at were (1) the capture of Richmond, the Southern capital, and (2), as a preliminary, the mastery of the Mississippi Valley. The Northern generals, McClellan and the rest, began with brilliant and ingenious plans for the capture of Richmond, but they were too ingenious, for they dissipated their strength. Five times great armies crossed the Potomac, and five times they were driven back by half their numbers. In 1862 four armies invaded Virginia and converged on Richmond; in three months Lee had routed them all. On at least two occasions the North was very near patching up an inconclusive peace. It is true that Lee was a man of genius and the fear of his name was worth an army corps, but over-elaborate tactics, which do not use adequately the strength of a people, play into the hands of a man of genius. We must remember, too, that the South was operating upon interior lines and so had the chance of striking rapid blows at the widely separated Northern forces. Even after Gettysburg, when the dark days had begun, she could play that game. You remember Longstreet's swift dash to the West which gave him the victory of Chickamauga and stopped the Federal invasion of Georgia.

A great strategical plan is always simple. Take Moltke's scheme which won the war of 1870; take Foch's strategy between July and November 1918. But the North began by flinging away her chances by divergent operations and divided counsels. Then came Grant's capture of Vicksburg, which, along with Admiral Farragut's operations in the lower waters, gave the North the line of the Mississippi. It was Grant's greatest



military triumph and a very fine achievement, and it will always remain an admirable example of that most interesting manœuvre when a general cuts himself loose from his base—a movement which Sherman made later in his great March to the Sea. Once the line of the Mississippi was won and Grant was in supreme command, the strategic plan of the North was simplified. The policy of pressing in the sides of the quadrilateral began. Sherman cut the Confederacy in two by marching across Georgia from Atlanta to Savannah, and the war zone was thereby narrowed to Virginia and the Carolinas. Grant with the Army of the Potomac advanced against Richmond. He fought his way southward, till he ultimately forced Lee behind the lines of Petersburg. There began that war of entrenchment with which for four years we ourselves were only too familiar.

Now mark the situation. The South had been blockaded for more than three years. Her troops were ragged and barefoot, with scanty food, scanty munitions, scanty anæsthetics. But they did not give in. Grant did not underrate his enemy. He knew that he could not starve him into surrender, but must beat him in the field. He used all his cards for the purpose and not merely a few. For example, he used the command of the sea. With its assistance in the 1864 campaign he shifted his base and line of communications no less than four times in two months. By the end of March 1865 he had so weakened the enemy's man-power that he forced him to evacuate Petersburg. Lee broke loose, but he could not escape. The net had closed round him, and on April 9, 1865, the greatest soldier since Napoleon, com-

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manding an army which was reduced to little more than a corps, laid down his arms at Appomattox.

The North had ended the war in the only way by which the Union could be safeguarded; she had won a complete and final victory. She had found the right answer to her three problems as the Allies found the same answer to the same problems in 1918. She had summoned the whole of her available man-power to arms, using for the purpose the legal imperative, and she had learned how to train them so that the initiative of the volunteer was preserved under the discipline of the corporate unit. She had used her navy to hem in the enemy and to starve and cripple that enemy. She had found men to lead her armies who could get the full value out of her greater numbers and better equipment. She had found the right strategical plan and in the end had stuck to it, discarding brilliant side-shows. And when all this had been done she had delivered hammer-blow after hammer-blow till the armed might of the South crumbled in the field.

### III

Such is a brief survey of a great struggle of ideals and of heroic men. In that war, fought by your grandfathers, there were nearly all the features of the war of six years ago, in which your fathers and your elder brothers fought and the young men whose names are inscribed on your memorial. If I were talking to a professional audience I could enlarge upon the technical matters in which the earlier contest anticipated the later. You will find the whole philosophy of trench warfare fore-



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shadowed in the struggles in the Wilderness of Virginia. You will find the whole use of cavalry as mounted infantry foreseen. You will find many of our modern weapons of war originating in that four-years campaign. You will find the minor tactics on both sides curiously like those of to-day. But I would direct your attention especially to those greater points of resemblance, which vindicate in the most dramatic form the continuity of human history. You begin with a profound spiritual conflict and a fateful decision. You have at the start quantity opposed to quality, undisciplined numbers and undirected wealth to smaller but more expert and compact numbers. You have the slow process by which potential strength is made actual, by which the true plan of war is discovered, and the right man to apply it. And, in both cases, at the end you have no easy victory, but that stark contest of human endurance which alone can decide an issue to which men have pledged their souls.

There is, too, a wider philosophic interest common to both wars. Fundamentally America had to fight the battle which all democracies have to face. Democracy as a form of government is subject to a perpetual challenge, not from foreign enemies alone, but from foes in its own household. Liberty demands a close and unremitting guardianship. The leaders of democracy must be prepared to do battle with false causes which profess to fight under the democratic banner. They must be prepared to speak the truth unflinchingly to their peoples, and shun that shallow sentiment and confidence in loud formulas which is their special temptation. They must be ready



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to make decisions far more difficult than any which can confront an oligarchy or a tyrant. They must be willing for the sake of true liberty to wage war upon licence. America faced the ordeal, and because she faced it manfully and clear-sightedly she emerged triumphant. It is an ordeal with which at any time the world may be again confronted. If it should be our fate to meet anew that fiery trial, may God send us the same clearness of vision and stalwartness of purpose.

Gentlemen, the day of wars may be over and our military text-books may for ever gather dust on the top shelves. But the interest of war cannot cease, for with all its cruelty and futility it has a power of raising men to their highest and exhibiting human nature at its greatest. The Civil War will remain to most of us a perpetual fascination because of the moral and intellectual elevation of its leaders. It produced two men of the very first order. On the losing side stands Lee, one of the foremost of the world's soldiers. Those of you who study his campaigns will find that the more they read themselves into his mind, the more they will marvel at its supremacy. As a man he had an antique grandeur of character. You remember what Bossuet said of Turenne, that he "could fight without anger, win without ambition, and triumph without vanity." That might be Lee's epitaph, and I would add to it that he could lose without bitterness. History has few nobler pictures to present than Lee in the closing days of the war, fighting a hopeless battle with gentleness and chivalry, and lifting his broken troops to super-human heights of achievement. I would set beside that the picture of the old man in his last years in

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the seclusion of a college presidency, striving by every counsel of wisdom and toleration to heal the wounds of his land.

The other great figure is Lincoln. That rugged face has become one of the two or three best known in the world. He has already passed into legend, and a figure has been constructed in men's minds, a gentle, humorous, patient, sentimental figure, which scarcely does justice to the great original. What I want to impress upon you about Lincoln is his tremendous *greatness*. Alone he took decisions which have altered the course of the world. When I study his career, behind all the lovable, quaint, and often grotesque characteristics, what strikes me most is his immense and lonely sublimity. There is a story told by John Hay of how after his death at some negro revival-meeting in the South the audience was moved to a strange exaltation, and men called for visions of prophets and apostles. One young man asked to see Lincoln, and an old negro rose and rebuked him. "No man see Linkum," he said. "Linkum walk as Jesus walk. No man see Linkum." On this I would make the comment which a great historian has made on a still greater figure. If the poet is right, and

"Earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice,"

then the apotheosis of Lincoln would not be the most extravagant freak of superstition.

To me he seems one of the two or three greatest men ever born of our blood. You will observe that I am talking as if we were one household and



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speaking of *our* blood, for no drop ran in his veins which was not British in its ultimate origin. I like to think that in him we see at its highest that kind of character and mind which is the special glory of our common race. He was wholly simple, without vanity or grandiosity or cant. He was a homely man, full of homely common sense and homely humour, but in the great moment he could rise to a grandeur which is for ever denied to posturing, self-conscious talent. He conducted the ordinary business of life in phrases of a homespun simplicity, but when necessary he could attain to a nobility of speech and a profundity of thought which have rarely been equalled. He was a plain man, loving his fellows and happy among them, but when the crisis came he could stand alone. He could talk with crowds and keep his virtue; he could preserve the common touch and yet walk with God. There is no such bond between peoples as that each should enter into the sacred places of the other, and in the noble merchantry of civilization let us remember that, if we of England have given Shakespeare to America, you have paid us back with Lincoln.



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V

LITERATURE AND  
TOPOGRAPHY

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## LITERATURE AND TOPOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

LET US FIRST OF ALL DISTINGUISH. A TASTE FOR topography is not the same thing as a love of the natural world; it is not even the same thing as an interest in landscape. There have been many eminent poets of nature who have scorned topography, and whose acute observation is so generalized that it is hopeless to identify it with particular tracts of the earth's surface. Where exactly did Keats listen to the nightingale? and which of the valleys and woods around London begot the "Ode to Autumn"? We happen to know, but the poems do not tell us. Wordsworth has less topography than we should expect, and so terrestrial and local a poet as Cowper has scarcely any. They condescend upon particulars, as must every poet, but not upon this class of particular.

The particulars with which topography is concerned are places—usually actual places, though this is not essential, for it is possible to create in detail an imaginary topography—and above all place-names. You give a concrete habitation to your fancies, and you name the habitation. You so adjust your background that it can be made the subject of a map. We shall consider the full

<sup>1</sup> An address to the Working Men's College, London, February 20, 1926.

purpose of this later, but one part of it is obvious. It is to produce an impression of reality, to link fancy to solid and nominate earth, and also to get from the use of sonorous names a certain verbal advantage. For place-names all over the world are splendid things. They have rarely been deliberately invented, but have grown up in the popular mind so that they are as apt to their subjects as a bearskin to a bear. They may have the flavour of ancient stateliness, or they may be harsh mementoes of old passions, or gnarled remnants of a forgotten humour, or they may reflect the poetry in the people's heart and sing themselves to music. But each is a nucleus of association, each comes into art with a tang of reality, as when a man who has been walking the hills in wild weather enters a drawing-room.

## I

I will begin with poetry, which is the purest form of literary art, and therefore the best introduction. Now the poets, with a few notable exceptions, are incomplete topographers. They are very much alive to the charm of place-names, but they rarely use them on the grand scale. It is not their business; they are concerned to convey hints and gleams, to open sudden casements, not to elaborate a landscape of which a plan can be drawn. The poet looks in the first instance to a place-name to give him a sounding cadence. There are a thousand instances in Greek and Latin—the torrent of splendid vocables in the eleventh piece of Catullus, Virgil's "*nemorosa Zacynthos*," Horace with his "*infamis scopulos*



Acroceraunia," and that famous falling close, "aut Lacedæmonium Tarentum"; or, to come to our own literature, Milton with the wizard names in "Lycidas":

"Where the great vision of the guarded Mount  
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;"

or Matthew Arnold, who had a most delicate ear for this special magic, with his

"Rejoicing through the hush'd Chorasman waste,"

and

"The soft Mediterranean breaks,"

and

"Crossing the stripling Thames at Bab-lock-hithe."

Or the poet uses a place-name to give concreteness and verisimilitude. Take the opening of two dissimilar masterpieces—Plato's *Republic* (if for the moment we may rank Plato among the poets whom he decried) and the ballad of Sir Patrick Spens—*Κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ* and "The King sits in Dunfermline town." Would they have been the same if Plato had written, "I was going for a walk yesterday," or the ballad-maker, "The King sits in his castle hall"? I think not. In the first case the reader's attention is straightway engaged by a familiar conversational detail; in the second his fancy is at once stimulated by a stately name redolent of a stormy past. The fashion is too familiar to need illustration. You will find it very notably in Latin poetry. Horace does not speak of going to the ends of the earth, but to the Hyperborean plains and the "ultimi



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Geloni." Indeed, in the Silver Latin poets the thing was carried so far that it became a rather tedious mannerism, and poetry sank to be the handmaid of uncouth geography. In our own literature this particularizing style is everywhere, both in poetry and prose, and if we wish authority we get it from so unexpected a source as Blake:

. . . " Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely  
organized Particulars,  
And not in the generalizing Demonstration of the Rational  
Power;  
The Infinite alone resides in Definite and Determinate  
Identity."

It was one of Edmund Burke's favourite devices. An interesting contrast has been drawn<sup>1</sup> between two passages, by Lord Brougham and by Burke, where the feeble abstractness of the one is set against the concreteness of the other. Brougham says:

" In all the despotisms of the East it has been observed that the further any part of the Empire is removed from the capital the more do its inhabitants enjoy some sort of rights and privileges."

Burke says:

" In large bodies the circulation of power must be less vigorous at the extremities. Nature has said it. The Turk cannot govern Egypt and Arabia and Curdistan as he governs Thrace, nor has he the same dominion in Crimea and Algiers which he has at Brusa and Smyrna."

You observe the difference in energy. The place-

<sup>1</sup> By E. J. Payne in the Introduction to *Burke: Select Works*, I, page xxxix.

name, the particular, seems not only to clinch the argument, but to enlarge and dignify it. If you want a good illustration of how a place-name, artfully used, can set the imagination working, you will find it in the opening of Apuleius's *Golden Ass*: "Thessaliam ex negotio petebam"—"I was setting out for Thessaly on business." That word "Thessaly" at once gives the key—Thessaly, the home of witchcraft, the northern land of savagery and wonder. As they say in America, the reader's bell is rung, and he is at once on the tiptoe of expectation.

But if we are to appreciate the notable part topography can play in poetry we must consider the poets who do not merely use it as an occasional grace, but in the fibre of whose method the thing is intertwined, of whose artistic scheme it is an organic part. I will take three poems which the judgment of mankind ranks high—the *Iliad*, *Paradise Lost*, and half a dozen of the Border Ballads. To the writers of these, local inhabitations are an essential of poetic thought; they see the world—even a fairy world—as a concrete place which can be planned and mapped and named; their characters can as ill do without their territorial connotations as a fighting man can lack a sword or shield. These writers not only use topography far more than other poets, but they use it in a different way; there is a distinction of kind as well as of degree. Every angler must occasionally present his fly "dry" to a trout; but the true dry-fly fisherman not only does this more frequently, but in a different way and for a different purpose, so that the whole character of the sport is transformed.



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First for the poet of the *Iliad*—Homer or some other. You will find, I think, in this type of poet that he now and then makes a special effort to wrest the last magic from place-names, and has one or two famous passages of thunderous, cumulative topography; and also that his mind is so interpenetrated by the *genius loci* that everywhere, in his most exalted as well as in his most pedestrian moments, a character cannot enter on the stage without his place of origin attending him like a heraldic blazon. The great example of the first is, of course, the "Catalogue" in the 2nd *Iliad*. It does not affect my argument that the "Catalogue" may, as many have urged, be the work of an inferior poet—not the poet, at any rate, of the "Embassy" or the "Doloneia." In the *Iliad* as we have it to-day I think it hard to deny that the "Catalogue" fulfils a vital artistic purpose—the purpose of setting the stage and preparing and stimulating the reader's mind, and that the work of this Homer is certainly as Homeric as that of any of the other Homers.

"And of them that possessed Lakedaimon lying low in the hollow of the hills, and Pharis and Sparta and Messe, the haunt of doves, and dwelt in Bryseiai and lovely Augeiai, and of them too that held Amyklai and the seashore keep of Helos, and that possessed Laas and dwelt around Oitylos, of such was the king's brother leader, even Menelaos of the loud war-cry, leader of sixty ships."

The great surge is sustained, the impetus does not slacken, we are in a world not of fancied figures but of living girded men-at-arms, each shouting the name of his little castle, whether it



be Messe of the Doves, or Enispe of the Winds, or Neriton of the Quivering Leaves. We get an impression of a vast background to the stage set at Troy, and of the hurrying of a great multitude thither, a sense at one and the same time of change and of permanence, of motion and of rest.

But, as I have said, it is not only in his set pieces that the poet of the *Iliad* gives rein to his love of topography; the thing haunts every line. Each casual arrival must be identified and blazoned. Sometimes the epithets are only conventional, "high-girt," "deep-walled," "fruitful"; sometimes they have in themselves the quality of poetry, so that they insinuate a note of gentler music, a flute among the drums of war. Sometimes a complete and unforgettable picture is sketched in a couple of lines. I will give you an instance of this last, which has always delighted me—that son of Teuthras whom Diomedes slays in the beginning of the 6th Book:

"Then Diomedes of the loud war-cry slew Axylos, son of Teuthras, who dwelt behind the strong walls of Arisbe, rich in all livelihood, and was dear to men, for he built his dwelling by the roadside and entertained every wayfarer."

It is all we are ever to know of this lord of Arisbe, but it is enough to make me, at any rate, become his partisan as against the devouring Diomedes, and lament the blow that ended the honest country squire, who had his house beside the road, like an old English manor, and was kind to tramps.

When we turn to *Paradise Lost* we find that Milton has followed and improved upon both

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aspects of the Homeric method. The poet of the *Iliad* was a topographer, but I doubt if he could have produced a map of the universe as he conceived it. Milton was both topographer and geographer. I can see exactly the kind of map of the world he would have drawn, how he would have portrayed Central Asia and the African coasts. It is quite easy to make a plan of Heaven and Hell and the intermediate regions according to the Miltonic cosmogony, for he gives us the most explicit details about them. His soaring imagination was conjoined with an intellect of such articulating power that he forces the wildest material to take definite and intelligible shape, and transmutes abstract space into concrete place.

Like Homer, Milton essays epic catalogues. The greatest is the roll-call of the Devils in the 1st Book, and, mark you, it is the place-names that matter—not Moloch and Baal and Thammuz so much as the thundering music of their temples:

“ Him the Ammonite  
Worshipt in Rabba and her watry Plain.  
In Argob and in Basan, to the stream  
Of utmost Arnon.”

Scarcely less fine is the vision of the kingdoms of the earth shown to Adam in the 11th Book:

“ His Eye might there command wherever stood  
City of old or modern Fame, the Seat  
Of mightiest Empire, from the destined Walls  
Of Cambalu, seat of Cathaian Can  
And Samarchand by Oxus, Temirs Throne,  
To Paquin of Sinæan Kings, and thence  
To Agra and Lahor of great Mogul



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Down to the golden Chersonese, or where  
 The Persian in Ecbatan sate, or since  
 In Hispahan, or where the Russian Ksar  
 In Mosco, or the Sultan in Bizance,  
 Turchestan-born; nor could his eye not ken  
 Th' Empire of Negus to his utmost Port  
 Ercoco and the less Maritime Kings  
 Mombaza, and Quiloa, and Melind,  
 And Sofala thought Ophir, to the Realme  
 Of Congo, and Angola fardest South;  
 Or thence from Niger Flood to Atlas Mount  
 The Kingdoms of Almansor, Fez and Sus,  
 Marocco and Algiers, and Tremisen;  
 On Europe thence, and where Rome was to sway  
 The World: in Spirit perhaps he also saw  
 Rich Mexico the seat of Motezume,  
 And Cusco in Peru, the richer seat  
 Of Atabalipa, and yet unspoil'd  
 Guiana, whose great Citie Geryons Sons  
 Call El Dorado."

I might cite also the vision in *Paradise Regained* of the Temptation of Our Lord, though it seems to me to be on a lower level of poetic merit, savouring of Apollonius Rhodius rather than of Homer.

But, as with the poet of the *Iliad*, it is the way in which the sense of place interpenetrates Milton's thought that is the primary artistic miracle. Every phase of the great argument evokes some stately place-name, and one recalls another, till the whole earth is laid under tribute. I am emphasizing here in especial the effect of the device upon the reader's mind, and not so much the effect—the tremendous effect—of those superb syllables upon his ear. Let me set forth a few instances:



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“Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks  
In Vallombrosa, where th’ Etrurian shades  
High overarch’t imbowr: or scatterd sedge  
Afloat, when with fierce Winds Orion arm’d  
Hath vext the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves orethrew  
Busiris and his Memphian Chivalrie.”

*Paradise Lost*, Book I.

“What resounds  
In Fable or Romance of Uthers Son  
Begirt with British and Armoric Knights;  
And all who since, Baptiz’d or Infidel,  
Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,  
Damasco, or Marocco, or Trebisonde,  
Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore  
When Charlemain with all his Peerage fell  
By Fontarabbia.”

*Paradise Lost*, Book I.

“As when farr off at Sea a Fleet descri’d  
Hangs in the Clouds, by Æquinoctial Winds  
Close sailing from Bengala, or the Isles  
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence Merchants bring  
Their spicie Drugs; they on the trading Flood  
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape  
Ply stemming nightly toward the Pole.”

*Paradise Lost*, Book II.

“As when a Gryphon through the Wilderness  
With winged course ore Hill or moarie Dale,  
Pursues the Arimaspean, who by stelh  
Had from his wakeful custody purloind  
The guarded Gold.”

*Paradise Lost*, Book II.

“As when to them who sail  
Beyond the Cape of Hope, and now are past  
Mozambic, off at Sea North-East windes blow  
Sabeian Odours from the spicie shoare  
Of Arabie the blest.”

*Paradise Lost*, Book IV.

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“ Not that faire field  
Of Enna, where Proserpin gathring flours  
Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie Dis  
Was gatherd, which cost Ceres all that pain  
To seek her through the world; nor that sweet Grove  
Of Daphne by Orontes, and th’ inspir’d  
Castalian Spring might with this Paradise  
Of Eden strive, nor that Nyseian Ile  
Girt with the River Triton, where old Cham,  
Whom Gentiles Ammon call and Libyan Jove,  
Hid Amalthea and her Florid Son  
Young Bacchus from his Stepdame Rhea’s eye;  
Nor where Abassin Kings thir issue Guard,  
Mount Amara, though this by som suppos’d  
True Paradise under the Ethiop Line  
By Nilus head, enclos’d with shining Rock,  
A whole day’s journey high.”

*Paradise Lost*, Book IV.

“ Sea he had searcht and Land  
From Eden over Pontus, and the Poole  
Mæotis, up beyond the River Ob;  
Downward as farr Antartic; and in length  
West from Orontes to the Ocean barr’d  
At Darien, thence to the Land where flowes  
Ganges and Indus.”

*Paradise Lost*, Book IX.

Lastly, we reach the ballad-maker, who was almost always drunk with the spirit of place. Consider. He had to hold the interest of his audience by bringing strange things within the orbit of their understanding, and how better could he do this than by emphasizing the familiar things in his tale—the names of crofts and peel towers, and hills and waters, which were within everyone’s knowledge? Further, the balladist was an

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artist, often a profound artist, and he had to lay a spell on the fancy or pluck at the heart-strings by some little sharp detail which stands up like a rock in a cascade to give shape and measure to the fall. There are many ballads of the sheer supernatural where topography would be meaningless, but even in these place-names may be used with cunning effect. Take "The Wife of Usher's Well." I do not know where on earth Usher's Well is; I do not know if it is anywhere; but in the ballad it becomes a fixed point in some dim spiritual land. Take the "Lyke Wake Dirge," and note how the names Whinny-muir and Brig o' Dread are used. The balladist gets in a place-name wherever he can. True Thomas is sitting on Huntly Bank when he spies the Queen of Elfland come riding down by the Eildon Tree—terrestrial points, both of them, which you may visit to-day in a charabanc. In "Tam Lin," the affair with the Fairy Queen takes place at Carterhaugh, where I have shot partridges. The adventure would not be so impressive if the venue were not named. And you remember the uncanny effect of a single place-name in the ballad of "The Daemon Lover":

" I'll show where the white lilies grow  
On the banks o' Italie."

It is in the riding ballads, however, the stories of actual doings in Sherwood Forest, or in the Cheviots, or in the Debateable Land, that topography is used on the grand scale—naturally, because these ballads deal with men in action in certain physical surroundings which largely determine the drama. Thus "Kinmont Willie":



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“ They led him thro’ the Liddel-rack  
And also thro’ the Carlisle sands;  
They brought him in to Carlisle castell,  
To be at my Lord Scroope’s commands.”

And “ Jamie Telfer ”:

“ ‘ Warn Wat o’ Harden, and his sons,  
Wi’ them will Borthwick Water ride;  
Warn Gaudilands, and Allanhaugh,  
And Gilmanscleugh, and Commonsides.  
‘ Ride by the gate at Priesthaughswire,  
And warn the Currors o’ the Lee;  
As ye cum down the Hermitage Slack,  
Warn doughty Willie o’ Gorrinberry.’ ”

And “ Lord Maxwell’s Good-night ”:

“ ‘ Adieu! Dumfries, my proper place,  
But and Carlaverock fair!  
Adieu! my castle of the Thrieve,  
Wi’ a’ my buildings there!  
Adieu! Lochmaben’s gate sae fair,  
And Langholm, where birks there be;  
Adieu! my ladye, and only joy,  
For I may not stay wi’ thee.’ ”

We are now—with these examples in our memory—in a position to determine the precise artistic effect in poetry of this generous use of particulars in the form of place-names. All concrete particulars, we are agreed, have their primary value in producing a sense of reality. The use of place-names on the grand scale gives an impression not only of the solid reality of the world of the poet, but of its spaciousness and its permanence. It produces upon the mind a sense

of rest. When Homer tells us of every little burg and clachan from which his warriors come we realize that far away from the feverish plains of Simois and Scamander there is an intricate human life going on, whether Troy falls or no. When Milton dazzles us with a torrent of jewelled names, each with the magic gift of conjuring up further mysteries, our sense of the greatness of the world and the majesty of life is enlarged. This artistic effect I should call specially that of peace. It gives us a world in which our reason and imagination can abide.

That is one consequence. The other is the opposite—not a sense of rest, but a sense of movement. We live our lives under the twin categories of time and space; if movement is to be shown, one or other must be particularized, and since you cannot particularize time (for people do not have a map of an hour in their memories) it must be space. From Homer to the penny reciter the best way to give an impression of speed is by means of a series of place-names, which are like the posts in a stadium. The movement may be a stately progress like the Archfiend's in *Paradise Lost*; it may be a mad gallop; but you can get both the stateliness and the speed from judicious topography. It is the secret of all martial ballads, all songs of raids and escapes, from "Kinmont Willie" to Macaulay's "Armada," and Browning's "How we brought the Good News," and Mr. Kipling's "Ballad of East and West." I need not multiply instances, but I would refer you to Sir Walter Scott as an example of a lesser master (in poetry, that is to say) who was an adept at this twofold use of place-names. For the first

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effect take the mustering of the Scott clan in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Or take the beautiful last lines of the poem:

“ But still,  
When summer smiled on sweet Bowhill,  
And July's eve, with balmy breath,  
Waved the blue-bells on Newark heath;  
When throstles sung on Harehead-shaw,  
And corn was green on Carterhaugh,  
And flourished, broad, Blackandro's oak,  
The aged Harper's soul awoke! ”

Or take the view of Edinburgh in *Marmion*, or the romantic opening of *The Lady of the Lake*. For the second I give you William of Deloraine's ride in *The Lay* from the time when he fords Teviot and passes the Peel of Goldiland, to the moment when

“ Far beneath, in lustre wan,  
Old Melros' rose, and fair Tweed ran.”

## II

From narrative in poetry we turn to narrative in prose. The art of prose fiction has a respectable ancestry, but it was a long time before it could divorce itself from poetic traditions and become a transcript and interpretation of the actual world. For ages the vapid offspring of Heliodorus and Longus and Achilles Tatius held the stage, and the story-teller dwelt among the pasteboard groves of artificial pastoral. If *Don Quixote* is the first modern novel it should be remembered that



Cervantes set more store by his *Galatea* and his *Persiles and Sigismunda*, romances in the true Heliodorus vein. You find the fashion in the Elizabethans—in Sir Philip Sidney, in Robert Greene, in Thomas Lodge: and it was not till a century later that fiction in England descended to earth from those insipid heavens, and the English novel was born with Defoe.

Defoe, in his most famous book, is a master of particulars, indeed, but these particulars are not place-names, for Robinson Crusoe's island is outside the map-maker's province. In other books, like *Moll Flanders*, he shows that he realizes what a sovereign aid to verisimilitude can be found in topography. But the great novelists of the eighteenth century were still a little apt to generalize their landscapes. Even Fielding, when he sets Tom Jones on his travels, indicates airily the direction of his movements, but does not condescend to place-names; while the novelists of manners, from Richardson to Jane Austen, all of them minute particularizers, who build up for the reader visible rooms, houses, streets, villages, are rarely inclined to take pains with the local orientation of their scenes. It is not till Sir Walter Scott that the twofold magic of a concrete nomenclature is discovered. His one predecessor, perhaps, is John Bunyan. The *Pilgrim's Progress* is no doubt an allegory, and its landscape (though you can guess at its prototypes in Bedfordshire and Bucks) is not of the earth but of the spirit; but none the less his abstractions have "become visible and walk about on roads"; and in the dream world which he creates the points have all the artistic value of terrestrial names. We can make a picture

of the Way in all its length from the Wicket Gate to the River; we know its stages as if we had travelled them; the names are allegorical conceptions, but they are turned into place-names as concrete and memorable as any in an English shire—the Slough of Despond, the Interpreter's House, the Hill Difficulty, the House Beautiful, the Valley of Humiliation, Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle, the plain called Ease, the Delectable Mountains, and the Land of Beulah.

One of the features of romance, it has been said, is a quickened consciousness of background. When the great romantic era opened with Sir Walter Scott it was inevitable that the topographical background should be amplified, and in Scott we see for the first time in fiction a specialization in localities. In all his greater novels he particularizes his scene, whether it be the Clyde valley in *Old Mortality*, or Liddesdale and the shores of Solway in *Guy Mannering*, or the Forfarshire coast in *The Antiquary*, or the neighbourhood of the capital city in *The Heart of Midlothian*, or the London streets in *The Fortunes of Nigel*. He does not always stick close to fact; the landscape of *Ivanhoe*, for example, is hard to place exactly on the map; but, real or invented, his is a particularized landscape which the reader must carry in his memory if he is to follow the tale. The great masters in the direct Scott tradition, Dumas and Victor Hugo, trod the same path. The ride of D'Artagnan to the sea owes its speed to its artful topography; and how minutely mapped is the mediæval Paris of *Notre-Dame* and the more modern city of *Les Misérables*. The fashion spread to a class of story which is not generally given the



name of romance. Dickens and Thackeray alike portray London more exactly and with more frequent recourse to particulars than any previous writers; Dickens, indeed, created a country of his own, the south-east corner of England, where to-day over a hundred streets and villages the spell of his imagination has woven memories more vivid than any historic tradition. Anthony Trollope in his Barsetshire novels invented and mapped out a terrestrial province, within the confines of which we can follow precisely the movements of his people. In our own day, to take an instance or two at random, Mr. Arnold Bennett has established the Five Towns in the literary geography of England; Mr. Neil Munro has made West Highland topography an essential of his two best romances; and Mr. Wells, in those books which, I take leave to think, are his chief title to fame, has followed Dickens and annexed south-east England, notably the London suburbs and the Channel towns, so that I, for one, can never think of the South Coast without a vision of Mr. Kipps, or see a sluggish Kent stream without thinking of Mr. Polly, or travel the Portsmouth road without meeting the lonely figure of Mr. Hoopdriver.

The novel of to-day which deals with men and women in action, and which cultivates something of the variousness of life itself, is almost always driven to seek aid from a precise topography. Place-names fill its pages as essential items in the background, organically linked to the main drama. The landscape need have no counterpart on a terrestrial map. Mr. Maurice Hewlett in *The Forest Lovers* devised a land as remote as



Broceliaunde, but it was exactly realized, so that the movement of his protagonists can be followed as if in the pages of Baedeker. I am far from arguing that all novels must conform to this type. The story of a lonely spiritual conflict may need only the barest physical setting; the highly sophisticated comedy of George Meredith and Henry James may find an adequate stage in a drawing-room; intellectuals can conduct their dreary business in an anonymous suburb. But the novel which aims at a convincing picture of the whirl and march of life in its central aspects, which would create characters with whom our interest is strongly engaged, can scarcely disregard topography. It must have a landscape as a background, and a landscape in which the points are orientated and named.

I will take<sup>o</sup> three examples of the use of topography in fiction on the grand scale. The first is Mr. Hardy's novels. We are not concerned for the moment with Mr. Hardy as a master-painter of landscape, though no one in our literature has reproduced the English scene more faithfully; nor as the philosophic interpreter of Nature in its relation to human life, so that a tract of ground, like Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*, becomes almost one of the *dramatis personæ*. The aspect of his work to which I would call your attention is rather that to which he refers in his General Preface to the collected edition of his novels and poems. His people, he says, though "typically and essentially those of any and every place," are "dwellers in a province bounded on the north by the Thames, on the south by the English Channel, on the east by a line running

from Hayling Island to Windsor Forest, and on the west by the Cornish coast." He goes on to say, "in response to inquiries from readers," that "the description of these backgrounds has been done from the real—that is to say, has something real for its basis, however illusively treated." He confesses to the use of many existing names, and when he has invented names he does not contradict the affirmation of "discerning people" that they recognize the originals. But, indeed, we do not require Mr. Hardy's admission. His novels, each a drama of its own locality, are collectively the drama and the history of south-west England. He has created a Wessex of his own, a land of the imagination where the reader can pick his way from town to town and from valley to valley, along ancient roads and rivers, by the aid of the guidance afforded by the writer. It is immaterial that this Wessex is substantially the Wessex of the geographers, and that Mr. Hardy's map can be superimposed upon the map of our atlases and be found in the main features to correspond with it. The point of artistic importance is that a writer who has searched the intricacies of the human heart and sounded the deeps of human passion has summoned place-names to his aid, and has deliberately elaborated and denominated his background.

What is the result? None other than that which we found in poetry. Tragedy and comedy walk on a familiar and recognizable stage. Our sense of reality is sharpened; the romance is heightened because it moves in a concrete world; we are given a quiet enduring background to the transient fervours of humanity. It is to be noted that Mr.



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Hardy seeks no illegitimate advantage from this method. When he has to deal with places traditionally famous, which have, so to speak, a ready-made atmosphere for the reader, as a rule he disguises them; Oxford, you remember, is "Christminster"; Winchester, "Wintoncester"; Shaftesbury, "Shaston"; Wantage, "Alfredston"; Sherborne, "Sherton Abbas." His topography and his nomenclature stand on their own merits, things as English as oak and ash and thorn, whether they be real names like Bubb-Down Hill and Crimmercrock Lane, or happy inventions like "Casterbridge" or "Kingsbere" or "Abbot's Cernal." It is a world in which the mind of the reader can contentedly abide.

My second instance is Mr. Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*. Here you have a narrower area and a more modest purpose. The book is a tale of the life of a moorland farm in the seventeenth century—of a farm rather than of a farmer, for, satisfying hero as John Ridd is, the charm fails as soon as he strays from his native Exmoor. It may be heresy, but apart from Plover's Barrows I do not think that we should be greatly interested in John, or even in Lorna; and what would the struggle with the Doones be worth if they had not lived in the Doone Valley? The magic of place interpenetrates the story—the twofold magic, for we have the sense of an antique, homely, enduring manner of life, and we have also at times the sense of swift movement. The story, you remember, begins at Blundell's school in Tiverton when John Fry arrives caked in the mud of the roads; and presently we are on the Moor watching the firing of Dunkery Beacon, and the place has us in its



thrall. The cooking and the cider-making and the shepherding are described so circumstantially that we know every inch of Plover's Barrows, and then romance begins when John, in the cold spring weather, goes spearing loaches up the Lynn water, and finds the Bagworthy stream and climbs the water-slide and has his first sight of Lorna. The scheme of the book is the homely decencies of the Ridds set against the tawdry magnificence and crime of the Doones, but it is still more Plover's Barrows set against the Doone Valley. Before he is a third of the way through the reader has a map in his head and has adopted the countryside, becoming for the time a dweller in the parish of Oare. There is no fumbling, for I do not think that Blackmore's skill in the delineation of landscape has been sufficiently praised; everything stands out clear and proportionate; before the end we know roughly the distance of Plover's Barrows from the other places which concern us, we follow the attack on the Doones with an anxious topographical eye, and in the great scene of Carver's flight and death we know, before the author tells us, that if he crosses Black Barrow Down he is certain to come to the Wizard's Slough. The book is a masterpiece in the imaginative use of a detailed landscape.

My last illustration shall be from Stevenson—a romance of the type called "picaresque," where bodily movement, and therefore topography, must play a major part. Now Stevenson is very good at another kind of work, where the *locale* is not mentioned, or only vaguely indicated. Such is the short story "Markheim"; such is *Prince Otto*; such, in a sense, is *The Master of Ballantrae*, for

though we are told that the scene is laid in the south-west of Scotland, and one or two skilfully chosen place-names are introduced—Durrisdier, St. Bride's, the Water of Swift—the action does not need them, needs no more indeed than the house, the policies, and a strip of seashore. But in *Kidnapped* the author gives rein to his love of maps and methodical landscapes. The journey of David and Alan is not more minutely treated than the same countryside in the stately pages of Dr. Johnson and Mr. Boswell. But mark the difference between a work of record and a work of art. I defy a reader of the *Tour to the Hebrides*, and still more of the *Journey to the Western Islands*, to be very clear where he is, unless recourse be had to the map; but Stevenson takes the reader constantly to a hill-top and gives him a wide prospect, so that he has a map in his memory. The names, too, are artfully selected. There is no glut of outlandish geography. We are piloted across Mull and Morvern, through Appin and the Moor of Rannoch to Ben Alder, and then south by Breadalbane and Balquhiddier to the shores of Forth, with just the proper amount of condescension upon place-names, for each one is a key-point. The effect is not of speed, but of distance—the fatigue of immense pathless spaces. When the action shifts in the beginning of *Catriona* to the environs of Edinburgh place-names are used with a different purpose; they are crowded together and the scale shrinks, in order to suggest an intricate flight in a closely settled and closely watched countryside. I will give you another specimen of Stevenson's cunning. David Balfour, you remember, is imprisoned on the Bass Rock



in order to prevent his being present at the trial of James Stewart at Inveraray; but he manages to get off earlier than he had hoped, and rides hard for the West. Now a dull writer, in order to get the effect of speed, would have loaded his pages with irrelevant topography and a minute time-schedule. Stevenson was wiser; this, he felt, was no case for a map, and swiftness must be got by some other means. So he is economical with his detail. David is set on shore at Clackmannan Pool on the Saturday afternoon at two; an hour later he is in Stirling; at six p.m. he is somewhere about Uam Var, and at eleven reaches the house of Duncan Dhu. He leaves straightway on foot and reaches Inveraray before the end of the sermon on the Sunday morning. It is all we want; we feel that David is indeed a moss-trooper, as the Lord Advocate said. Now that journey is to my mind incredible, for no man, I think, could start on his two legs about eleven p.m. from somewhere on the east side of Balquhiddy, after having ridden from Clackmannan, and be in Inveraray before noon on the next day. The feat is as impossible in the time as the journey of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* from Pylos to Sparta. It is like the story of Artamines' single-handed combats, which Major Bellenden in *Old Mortality* complained "put all pretty men's actions out of countenance." But artistically it is wholly right; Stevenson has not already elaborated this piece of country, so the reader's credulity is not strained, while the few selected details are all that is needed to quicken the fancy.



## III

What is the conclusion of our brief survey? That in certain forms of literature, and these not the lowest, a local habitation and a name are essentials for success. I am not decrying the beauty of *homelessness*. There are types of art where the purpose is a country "east of the sun and west of the moon," and where the terrestrial application is of necessity dim and tenuous, where fancy is free of mundane fetters and spirit creates its own spiritual landmarks. But for the normal types, for narrative in verse or prose, above all the fiction which seeks to move us with something of the emotions of life, there must be a sense of place as well as of character. The writer who is a "kinless loon," who has no roots down in the soil and cannot call any tract of country his own, may be a great artist, but he will fall short of the widest appeal, for the ordinary stuff of humanity is deep in local affections, a devotee, in Edmund Burke's famous words, of "all the little quiet rivulets that water an humble, a contracted, but not an unfruitful field." The writer who has the same prepossession, who can build up in detail his background and dwell lovingly on its contours and its place-names, establishes an instant kinship, and is the more moving and persuasive because he appeals to a most ancient instinct in the heart of man.

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VI

THE VICTORIAN  
CHANCELLORS



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## THE VICTORIAN CHANCELLORS

IT WAS A HAPPY INSPIRATION TO BRING LORD Campbell's "Lives of the Chancellors" down to the end of the century. That light-hearted dignitary, when, about the year 1841, being for the moment out of office, he bethought himself of writing a book, created a new biographical form. England had seen many lives of eminent lawyers before his day, but they had been written by hacks or dull brother-lawyers, and found few readers for their three-volume ponderosity. Lord Campbell aimed at short lives, critical rather than biographical, picturesque rather than conscientious—a portrait-gallery instead of a mausoleum. He had great gifts and great failings. He was habitually inaccurate, incurably slipshod in style, and steeped to the eyes in prejudice. But he had the supreme merit of being always interesting. He turned names which had hitherto been the thin ghosts of legal literature into full-bodied men. He has left us one of the most fascinating books in modern English, and we are very willing to forgive his blunders. Mr. Atlay<sup>1</sup> has rewritten the lives of Lyndhurst and Brougham, who, being too near

<sup>1</sup> *The Victorian Chancellors*. By J. B. Atlay. 2 vols. London.  
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Lord Campbell's own age, suffered much at his hands, and he has added the lives of that notable succession of Chancellors who made the later Victorian age an epoch in our legal history. No great lawyer could ask for a more competent biographer. He can appreciate from the professional standpoint a career at the Bar and on the Bench; he is an admirable historian of politics; and he is a keen and kindly student of character. Like Lord Campbell he is always readable, and unlike Lord Campbell he is conspicuously fair and accurate. It is a book which we can recommend to anyone in search of good entertainment.

A Chancellor stands in a different class from an ordinary judge. He is at the head of the administration of law, but he is also a great political figure—the Speaker of the House of Lords, a member of the Cabinet, and a weighty voice in all Government measures. It may happen that he is mainly lawyer, and that his doings are writ in the law reports rather than on the ampler page of history. But he may be as much statesman as judge. Like Lyndhurst or Cairns, he may be the leader of his party in the Upper House and have the Premiership at his command. Or he may be neither lawyer nor statesman, but only a figure, like Brougham, of tireless vitality and bravado. Whatever his performances on the Woolsack, he must have had a strenuous and distinguished career before he reached it. A cipher or an unknown quantity may enter the Cabinet, but he cannot hold the Great Seal. The man who has reached the professional eminence which makes the Woolsack possible must already have made some kind of name in both law and politics. We can, therefore, pre-



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suppose a certain level of distinction. In the Victorian era especially, when policy was in transition and the judicial framework in the melting-pot, there was no Chancellor who did not in some way stand out beyond the mass of his contemporaries. That some are forgotten and others still remembered is due more to personality than to attainments. A highly competent but colourless figure passes soon into the dusk of legal tradition. To survive, a man must have either abnormal talent or an abnormal personality. He must in some way strike the imagination of his age, for the popular imagination is the best preservative of fame.

We may group the Victorian Chancellors into those whom our generation is beginning to forget: those whom we remember as great lawyers: those who will live by statesmanship as well as by law: and those who survive as exceptional personalities. In the first class we should place Cottenham, Truro, and Cranworth, and, with some hesitation, Chelmsford and Hatherley. The first two are already little more than names. Cottenham was born with every advantage, and had an easy path to success. He was a profound lawyer, an excellent judge, and the best of husbands and fathers: and there we leave him. Truro deserves remembrance, along with Lord Hardwicke, as an encouragement to the sons of solicitors. He made a large fortune, sat peaceably on the Woolsack, and, as his second wife, married a king's granddaughter. Cranworth, as someone tactfully told him on his resumption of the Woolsack after Westbury's disgrace, is a shining instance of how much wiser it is to be good than clever. He was perfectly con-

scious of his limitations, for once in the hearing of Crabb Robinson he thanked God for them. His early years at the Bar were remarkable for nothing but his popularity. Everyone who met him fell under the spell of his kindly simplicity. He was making scarcely £500 a year, when, to his amazement, he was offered the Solicitor-Generalship. After five years of modest service he became a Baron of Exchequer, which was more than he had ever hoped for. His seat in Parliament was shaky, and he had no practice to return to. In his new capacity he presided at the Rush murder case, and won many laurels, for it was precisely the kind of case where his gentleness, his patience, and his high conscientiousness were seen at their best. He found himself famous for the first time, was created Vice-Chancellor and a peer, and was talked of for the highest office. His Whiggism was unimpeachable, and, on the formation of Lord Aberdeen's Coalition Government in 1852, he received the Great Seal with general approval. He was not a great Chancellor, and he was a very bad debater in the House of Lords, so in the Palmerston Ministry of 1859 he was passed over and Campbell appointed in his place. But in 1865, at seventy-five, he received the Great Seal a second time, and held it for a year. Lord Selbourne has left it on record that "in steady good sense, judicial patience, and impartiality and freedom from prejudice," he was surpassed by no Chancellor he had known. A more famous dictum is that of Lord Westbury, who, when asked why the Chancellor always sat in the Court of Appeal with the Lords Justices, replied that it arose from a childish indisposition to be left alone in the dark.



Chelmsford was a splendid creature, physically and intellectually. He began life as a midshipman, and bore throughout his career something of the bluff geniality of His Majesty's navy. Then he thought of the West Indian Bar, but, like Cairns in a similar situation, was persuaded to try his chance in England. For £2,000 he bought a place in the old Palace Court—the object of “Jacob Omnium's” crusade—which made a good crutch for the young lawyer. His first great case was a brief for the defence in the Weare and Thurtell murder trial, but for long the wheels of his chariot drove slowly. Brougham, at the request of Lyndhurst, gave him a silk gown when he was forty, and next year he was engaged in Daniel O'Connell's famous election petition. In subsequent cases of the same type he made a great reputation by the vigour with which he denounced the partisanship of the House of Commons Committees. He entered Parliament for Woodstock, became Solicitor-General in 1844, and, since Mr. Attorney was a cipher, bore the brunt of Government business. In his new capacity he won high praise, and being a staunch Conservative of the old school, he was a *persona grata* to Lord Derby. When Palmerston went out in 1858, Lord St. Leonards was too old to resume the Chancellorship, and it fell naturally to Thesiger. He took the title of Lord Chelmsford, a title made illustrious by his descendants in other spheres of action. He would have made an excellent Chief-Justice, but he was too little the born lawyer to be able to make up for the lack of knowledge of the equity side of his business. He held the post a second time in 1866, and in 1868 when Lord Derby



resigned found himself quietly shelved. Disraeli, whom he detested, wanted the place for Cairns. He was long remembered at the Bar as a very witty and kindly judge, who never fell below the high traditions of his office. He made jokes, as Hood made puns, from a natural inability to refrain. "Holloa," a man once asked in the robing-room, "whose castor is this?" "Pollock's, of course," was Thesiger's reply.

Hatherley is not a romantic figure, but he began life in the atmosphere of courts and intrigues. His father was the famous Alderman Wood, Queen Caroline's champion, and one of the trustees of the Duke of Kent's estates. It was due to money advanced by him personally that the Duke and Duchess were able to return to England in time for the Princess Victoria to be born at Kensington Palace. Young Wood, having been expelled from Winchester, went to study at Geneva, whence he made a journey into Italy to help to collect rebutting evidence in the Queen's divorce case. After some years at Cambridge he was called to the Bar, and began his profession with a variety of experience behind him which no contemporary could lay claim to. He married early, and his wedded life was a model of happiness. If Wood's career is somewhat unfeatured, it was very happy and desirable. His sincere piety and kindness made him, like Cranworth, one of the best loved men of his generation. In politics he was an old-fashioned Liberal, who adored the Church of England, thought Kingsley a Jacobin, and looked on the co-operative movement as a "ferocious monster." He disliked all field sports, and his recreation was theology. "He is a mere bundle of virtues," said

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Westbury, "without a redeeming vice." He was successively a law officer, Vice-Chancellor for sixteen years (where he was very good), a Lord Justice of Appeal for nine months, and Lord Chancellor in Mr. Gladstone's 1868 Ministry. Roundell Palmer would have had the place had he not refused to follow Mr. Gladstone in his Irish Church policy. Lord Hatherley, as Wood had become, was a docile Gladstonian, and he had need of all his docility, for he had to defend some of his chief's least defensible jobs. He resigned in 1872, and died as recently as 1881. Lord Selborne's eulogy in the House of Lords was not undeserved. "He was a man who had as much purity and simplicity, as much conscientiousness and energy and sound judgment, as, taking into account the infirmity of man, any of us could hope to attain to."

Of those whose reputation will ever be green in the law reports, but to whom the ordinary man will scarcely do justice, St. Leonards is the chief. The qualities which make a great judge are not always those which make a man eminent at the Bar. An advocate is carried to fortune by the natural gift of the orator, by endowments of presence, manner, or voice, by a peculiar insight into human nature and a ready sympathy, or by some pre-eminent skill of intellectual fence. But the judge is concerned with none of those things: he may have them all, and be a signal failure. The meticulous interpretation of statutes, the orderly balancing of precedents and the deduction of principles, need none of the showy endowments of successful advocacy. Of the three Victorian Chancellors who will be remembered mainly as



great judges, none won exceptional fame at the Bar. There is no such tradition of their prowess as attaches to Erskine, or Loughborough, or Scarlett, or, in a later day, to Charles Russell. Indeed St. Leonards, the greatest of the three, seems, apart from vast learning and a clear mind, to have had scarcely any of the conventional qualities of the advocate. Like Lord Tenterden, he was the son of a barber, and went to neither of the universities. Amazingly precocious, and the author of standard law books while still in his early twenties, he came rapidly to the front through sheer competence. Once, after dining early, he got through thirty-five briefs before going to the House of Commons at eleven—which shows how complete was his mastery of his profession. He was respected by all parties—by the Radicals for his efforts towards law reform, by the Tories for his unbending Toryism in all other matters, and by the Bar for his learning and his formidable temper. He was Lord Chancellor of Ireland before succeeding to the English office, and no doubt has ever been cast upon his value as a judge. He knew every case in the books, he went straight to the heart of the subject, and woe betide the counsel who tried to fob him off with irrelevancies. The reading of his decisions produces the impression of a powerful intellect working joyfully on the driest material. There has probably never been a greater judge, so far as the mere satisfactory decision of complex cases goes. What he seems to lack is that formative intelligence which we discern in men like Mansfield and Cairns, which codifies the law as it goes along and leaves behind it not judgments merely but principles of illumination. In



St. Leonards the old Chancery mind, with its powers and limitations, reached its highest level. He is not such a hero of tales as some of his brethren, but there seems no doubt that his was the bitter saying of Brougham—that if he knew a little law he would know a little of everything.

The General Election of 1895, and his sudden death four years later at Washington, prevented the world from fully tasting Lord Herschell's quality as a judge. Undoubtedly he must stand in the front rank. He administered the pure law, as it was his duty to do, leaving considerations of expediency to the Legislature, and at the same time there was no trifling or pedantry in his decisions. In quickness of mind and masculine robustness of understanding he had much in common with his successor. Lord Halsbury seems to us to stand with St. Leonards as the greatest purely legal mind of the nineteenth century, and in his influence on English law he is not to be paralleled since Mansfield sat at the Guildhall. He made his first reputation at the Old Bailey rather as a "bonny fighter" than as a lawyer. He had always a certain contempt for mere learning. "Too much reading and not enough thinking" he announced to be the source of many legal failures. He made a brilliant law officer, for never was man more combative and tenacious in debate. A Conservative not far removed from the Eldon type, Lord Salisbury leaned on him as Disraeli had leaned on Cairns. He went to the Woolsack in 1885, mainly owing to the representations of Lord Randolph Churchill; and his three chancellorships covered a total of seventeen years—a record exceeded only by Eldon and Hardwicke. Such a

tenure of office means that the shaping of modern law as well as the appointment of the modern Bench were in his hands. His legal influence was solely for good. A master of the common law without a rival, he clarified and enunciated its principles, and enforced common-sense rules of interpretation. His supreme merit was that he always applied to a case the appropriate method. In a subtle manner he could be as subtle as Westbury, but no man was ever quicker to clear the ground of false subtleties and get down to the simple problem. With his mingled boldness and conservatism—the true temper of a great judge—he kept the law of England adequate to the increasing needs of the modern world.

From the pure lawyers we pass to the men who were both lawyers and statesmen—the figures which must rank with Peel and Gladstone, Disraeli and Salisbury, in the history of the century. The first, and the most fascinating, is Lyndhurst. The son of Copley, the portrait-painter, he settled down, after a brilliant career at Cambridge, to make a living in the most uncertain of all professions. His rise was slow, and for years he shut himself off from the world. His chance came when he forswore the Whig principles of his youth and entered the House of Commons as the legal champion of the Tories. Thereafter his career was one long triumphal progress. He thrice occupied the Woolsack, and it is possible that, like Mansfield, he might have been Premier had he pleased. If he was not one of the greatest of English lawyers, he was certainly one of the greatest minds that ever applied itself to our law. His intellectual vitality was such that no subject came under his



cognizance which he did not master. He was earnest in the cause of law reform, however Tory might be his views in politics; but the truth is that he probably did not care enough about political problems to trouble to have opinions. He shaped his course from day to day, asking only one thing—the chance of exercising his superb powers of mind. “He played the game of life,” wrote Bagehot, “for low and selfish objects, and yet, by the intellectual power with which he played it, he redeemed the game from its intrinsic degradation.” He was a typical exponent of the “grand manner”—a great judge, who liked to look like a cavalry officer, and preferred smart to legal society. He was completely successful, and for long he and his wife were the most brilliant features in the fashionable world. In his attitude towards enemies and rivals in the Press and in Parliament he never lost the air of the *grand seigneur*. He disregarded abuse, and when fate put an opponent in his power, went out of his way to treat him magnanimously. To the end of a long life he retained a boyish gaiety, and bore his honours with the same lordly ease with which he had won them. His last words were: “Happy? Yes, supremely happy.” To such a man the world cannot grudge success, and jealousy among his contemporaries was soon lost in admiration. He was so overwhelmingly competent that his colleagues both on the Bench and in the Cabinet habitually deferred to him, and for long he was the real centre of the Tory party. Lord Westbury, a man not lavish in praise, once told Jowett that Lyndhurst’s was the finest judicial intellect he had ever known. To the earnest world of Reformers



and Chartists and Benthamites he remained a mystery. They could not comprehend the mind which, seeing all sides of a problem, had no impulse to any particular solution. The "pure" reason is not popular among devotees of the "practical." Hence, save by his intimate friends, he was never trusted. The man who made no concessions to popular sentiment, whose mind cut so cleanly through confused popular dogmas, could not be expected to win the adoration of the public. Lyndhurst's defence might well have been that which Stevenson put into the mouth of another judge. "I have no call to be bonny," said Weir of Hermiston; "I'm a man that gets through with my day's business, and let that suffice."

Lyndhurst was unpopular, but human. Cairns, equally aloof from common popularity, had something unhuman in all his greatness. The precocious boy became the brilliant young man, and in a very short space of time the first lawyer of the day. He never looked back in his career; he never even stumbled. Member for Belfast at thirty-three; a law officer at thirty-nine; a Lord Justice and a peer at forty-seven; and Lord Chancellor at forty-nine—no man had ever a swifter or smoother rise to power. He was fortunate in many things, and not least in his political convictions. Far too clear-sighted to be a Tory of the Eldon school, his acute, closely reasoning mind distrusted every popular emotion and saw the fallacies in every popular cry. There is no more typical Conservative in English history. Before his entry into Parliament it would have been difficult to prophesy political success. His

impassive manner and his weak voice seemed ill-suited to impress a popular assembly. But opposition kindled him, and his very impassivity put his tremendous dialectical powers always at his command. He tore arguments to pieces with a fierce and yet icy vigour. Lord Blachford has left a note of the effect he produced:

“It seems as if you had never done with him. He makes a case against you—a clear, incisive case—and then when that is worked out, and you are thinking how to get out of the scrape, you begin to find that what you have heard is not the scrape, but only the beginning of it; the foundation of a series of aggravations and misfortunes which sink you deeper in the mire and close all avenues of escape.”

Like all great debaters, he never mixed good and bad arguments: he went straight to the key of the opposition and battered it with horse, foot, and artillery. In the House of Lords he was perhaps less effective. He needed rousing, and when he had a polite and somnolent audience he was apt to be dull and to labour his case. Yet we question if the Upper Chamber has ever listened to a more passionate and moving eloquence than the famous “Peace with Dishonour” speech after Majuba. As a judge he must stand among the greatest. He was the philosophic lawyer, with an instinct for principles as well as a keen eye for facts. For him the law was always the real world in its formal aspect. His judgments convinced as much from their grip of reality as from their logical weight. As a statesman, his chief success was the compromise over the Irish Church, where the part he played was both wise and courageous. As a legal



## HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS

reformer he has, along with Selborne, the credit of the Judicature Acts. "Lord Cairns," said the late Lord Salisbury, "united qualities not often granted to one man: he was equally great as a statesman, as a lawyer, and as a legislator." Political opponents called him partisan, but unless Conservatism is to be held a bar to statesmanship, Cairns deserved the first of Lord Salisbury's titles as well as the others. One interesting trait should not be left unnoticed: he belonged to that considerable class of Victorian Chancellors who were not only virtuous but pious. The coldest of men must have somewhere a fount of emotion, and Cairns found his in evangelical religion. The earnest Nonconformist, who worshipped Mr. Gladstone and identified godliness with Liberalism, was amazed to find the Tory Lord Chancellor, hymn-book in hand, on the platforms of Messrs. Moody and Sankey. Members of the Bar, desirous of rising in their profession, used to attend assiduously at religious meetings, in the hope of catching the Chancellor's eye. There was no ostentation with him, and no concealment. From his first day at the Bar he refused to work on the Sabbath, and in the stress of his busiest years he rose every morning early for an hour's prayer and Bible-reading. His intellect—the greatest pure intellect of his day—accepted and was happy in the simple faith of his childhood.

Selborne, though to our mind intellectually less masterful, is a more gracious figure than Cairns. The difference between their temperaments is the difference between the hard Calvinism of the Ulster Scot and the gentler creed of Oxford Anglicanism. Roundell Palmer was in type the



best product of the public school and university system. The stamp of Oxford was always on him, and, save Westbury and Bowen, his culture was the widest of any Victorian lawyer. When such a man gives himself whole-heartedly to law, it means a sacrifice of inclination which is a salutary discipline for character. The day comes when the stony places are past, and the forgotten interests return to embellish and illumine the legal attainments. Hence we find in Selborne a harmoniousness and grace of temperament which were wanting in his great contemporary. A few years of journalism on *The Times* did him no harm, and he was soon in so good a practice that he could think of Parliament. In everything but Church questions he was mildly Liberal: there he was an unbending Tory, and his views were later to bar for a moment his professional advance. Like Bowen, he spent himself on his profession, and admitted once having worked from 2 a.m. on Monday till late on Saturday without ever going to bed. In 1861, when Bethell became Chancellor, he was made Solicitor-General, and many wished him to become Attorney. But Lord Westbury declined to promote him over the head of Sir William Atherton, saying genially that it was impossible, since Sir William had no head. He made his mark in the House as an advocate of Parliamentary reform, and did much to enlarge the bounds of the Conservative Reform Bill of 1867. So distinguished a Parliamentarian did he become, that he was coupled with Gladstone as the protagonist of the Opposition, and in some quarters was considered the future Prime Minister. He differed, however, from his chief on the Irish

Church question, and when Gladstone returned to power, he without hesitation declined the Wool-sack—an act of self-denial which was later to be repeated by Lord James of Hereford. The incident brought him great popular prestige, and for the rest of his life he enjoyed a reputation for high-mindedness such as falls to the lot of few lawyers. He was senior British Counsel in the *Alabama* arbitration at Geneva, and it was surely the irony of fate that the best advocate living, Sir Alexander Cockburn, should have sat as arbitrator, and the most judicially-minded of men appeared before him to argue the British case. On Hatherley's resignation in 1872 he became Lord Chancellor, and for the next year or two was busied with the immense labour of the Judicature Acts. There may be dispute as to the value of some of the changes he effected, but there can be no question as to the industry and ability which he showed in the elaboration of the scheme. As a judge he was quick, clear, admirably impartial, and unfailingly courteous. There was always a touch of Oxford precision in his speech, and a slight primness, which made Bowen dub him "the pious cricket on the hearth." Like Cairns, his main interests were theological, but with a difference. The forms of worship attracted him, and he was the chief living authority on hymns. He was an old-fashioned High Churchman, who wished to preserve a beautiful ritual, and revive the old synodical organization; but he had no more patience than Lord Westbury with the high-fliers who claimed a divine mission to break the law. His party label was Liberal, but his mind was Conservative. He thought Mr. Gladstone's



Mid-Lothian campaign "a precedent tending in its results to the degradation of British politics"; and over the Home Rule question he broke finally with his leader. It was a new Selborne who spoke with passion on Unionist platforms, and no adherent lent more weight to the cause. He died at the age of eighty-three, retaining to the last his vigour of mind and body. It is pleasant to contemplate a career so strenuous and useful, so nobly sustained, and so crowned with due rewards.

There remain three figures aside from the succession of dignified and decorous Chancellors. All three were men of great ability, but each had some core of eccentricity, some twist in character or taste, which puts him in a class apart from his fellows. Of the three, Brougham is the strangest. It is the habit of Chancellors to live long, but Brougham outlived his reputation. That "surest and most voluminous among the sons of men," after a rise which, for meteoric brilliance, makes most careers pale, saw himself the most disliked, suspected and disconsidered of public figures. Few characters were more strangely compounded of strength and weakness. His mind was without critical and logical power. His reach perpetually exceeded his grasp, and he became that most trying of spectacles, an inaccurate polymath. All his qualities neighboured on vices. His courage became impudence, his impressive eloquence was on the edge of bathos, his industry was scarcely distinguishable in its results from indolence, and his immense knowledge had often from its curious gaps the effect of ignorance. The first impression he made on acquaintances was overwhelming. "The first man the country has ever



seen since Burke's time," wrote Grey as early as 1809. And bitterly as he offended every man who worked with him, there must have been a strange charm about his personality, for people like Grey and Melbourne and Queen Adelaide, who had every reason to hate him, all came under his spell again before their death. To a later generation he is a pure enigma. We have no materials to judge him by, since his judicial decisions are worthless, his writings reveal little but laboured inaccuracy, and his speeches, like most re-published oratory, are, in Sir James Fitzjames Stephen's phrase, no better than "mouldy wedding-cake." He will be remembered best as the hero of insane pranks and the subject of good stories. It is almost forgotten that he founded London University, inaugurated the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and did much to reform Chancery procedure. His solid work is cast into the shade by his colossal impostures. A man who circulated the story of his death in order to find out the view his contemporaries took of him, and having scarcely a smattering of Greek published an edition of Demosthenes' "On the Crown" with *variæ lectiones*, had no common share of audacity. From his royal progress through Scotland to his speech on the Reform Bill, when he flung himself upon his knees and, having consumed much port, was unable to rise again, his career is starred with every form of absurdity. Once at Buckingham Palace he offered to carry to his friend the King of the French any letter with which her Majesty might entrust him. He told Cabinet secrets to *The Times*, and circulated amazing tales to his own credit, which he must

have believed, for they appear in his *Memoirs*. According to Charles Greville, he once conducted a party over Hanbury's Brewery, explaining minutely every detail of the operations, and causing the hair of the Scotch foreman to stand on end as he heard the discourse of the Lord Chancellor, without "one word o' truth frae beginnin' to en'." Yet, with all his faults, he is a figure of superb vitality, and behind his self-seeking burned a hatred of wrong and a love of his fellow-men which do much to redeem the follies of his life. In the circle of doctrinaire Whigs who were his contemporaries he moves like a panther among seals—a dangerous, uncertain creature, but with a fierce life in him beyond his associates.

Lord Campbell has to the present writer an air of Sir Andrew Wylie in Galt's novel. He is one type of successful Scotsman, immensely proud of having risen from nothing, and yet inclined to forget his beginnings; vain, kindly, and innocently snobbish. Devoted to his family, and in a sense to his birthplace, he yet lamented that nothing could rid him of his Scotch accent, and as candidate for Edinburgh his wild efforts towards Anglified speech were the delight of his constituents. His was not a character with much elevation. Place, power, and comfort were his honourable, but pedestrian, ambitions. His vanity was insatiable, but it was the vanity of Boswell, and lacked neither intelligence nor humour. And like all such vanity it provided for the treasuring of every detail in his life. His diary and autobiography are as good reading as the *Lives of the Chancellors*. We know "Jock Campbell" in every circumstance of life, in his loneliness and



in his success, in the Pepysian undress of his innermost thoughts and in the rhetoric of his public utterances, till the very intimacy to which he admits us inspires a kind of affection for so human a soul. We see him in his early London days, very poor and rather friendless, writing dramatic criticism for a living. Being possessed of an iron frame and indomitable self-confidence, he slowly works his way into practice, filling up his time with law-reporting, and keen as a hawk for the chance which should lead to success. The law is a hard mistress, but she never denies a single-hearted votary. By the age of thirty-five he is making £2,000 a year, and dining out in society. He marries Scarlett's daughter, and, his place being assured, goes into Parliament. Very soon he is a law officer, and is counsel for the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, in the action brought against him by the husband of Mrs. Norton. He was also in the famous *Stockdale v. Hansard* case on Parliamentary privilege, a case which is never out of his letters. For a short time, like St. Leonards, he was Lord Chancellor of Ireland, and when relieved of office proceeded to write his *Lives of the Chancellors*, and to discuss in a curious brochure the probabilities of Shakespeare having been bred a lawyer. Campbell suffered a little from Brougham's complaint of desiring to be thought a universal genius, but, wiser than Brougham, he confined his attempts to provinces where he was more or less qualified to speak. After a short term as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, he succeeded Denman as Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench. Here there was no question of his merit, for he was an admirable common-



lawyer, and had a strong masculine understanding. He worked incessantly, wore down his puisnes, and has left thirteen solid volumes of still-quoted decisions. His contemporaries may well have thought that he had reached his highest point, but his luck never deserted him. When Palmerston formed his last Ministry he was in difficulties for a Chancellor, and Lyndhurst suggested Campbell. He received the Great Seal when he was over eighty—a record, he tells us, unparalleled since St. Swithin. For two years he sat on the Woolsack, a docile and venerable figure whom no one wished to criticize. His best-remembered achievement was the raising to the Bench, in spite of the clamour of the Bar, of the future Lord Blackburn, who was then a law reporter, with neither a silk gown nor a practice. Campbell was not a judge of the first order, but his personality, in the life of his age, was certainly one of the first importance. It is easy to criticize him, for he was the most fallible of mortals. In matters of good feeling he was like a bull in a china shop, and the decencies and conventions of life go crashing as he moves. At one moment his note is false humility, as is the famous dedication to his volume of collected speeches; at another it is robust braggadocio. He had the astounding bad taste to republish in the said volume his speech in the Melbourne case. The same lack of breeding is apparent in his *Lives*, for, as someone said, he treats his most eminent predecessors as if they were "waifs on a manor." His feelings had become blunted in his long struggle for place, and his one criterion was success. Yet, with it all, there is much to be grateful for in the author,

much to admire in the judge, and much to like in the man. He was very human in his failings, and the same humanity carried with it the virtues of courage, optimism, and a ready kindness.

It is a pity that Mr. Meredith, that mighty analyst of strange souls, was never moved to portray in fiction the character of Westbury. It would have repaid the study of a master. Like Selborne, Bethell was a devoted son of Oxford, and his Oxford manner never left him. Let it be remembered, for the encouragement of undergraduates, that his rendering of a passage in Pindar during his oral examination for his degree led afterwards to his first important brief. But there was no Attic grace, no classic mellowness, in his soul. Despising mankind, especially that portion of it which embraced his colleagues, he became the foremost scourge of fools in his generation. He was born with a gift of style which might have made him a great man of letters. Exact, appropriate, and adequate sentences flowed easily from his lips. With this appalling clarity of thought and deftness of phrase he joined a gentle voice and a lisping, mincing accent, so that his sarcasm had the piquancy of gall in honey. His early years at the Bar were years of unremitting toil. He dined habitually in chambers off a mutton-chop and a glass of water. Passionless lucidity was the mark of his advocacy, and no man was more fertile in resource, more wholly self-possessed, or more contemptuous of an adversary. He could so state his own case that any opposition seemed to involve the lunacy of the opponent. He entered Parliament as a Conservative, but he was as scornful of political prin-



ciples as of other things, and calmly went over to the Liberals when their prospects seemed rosier. With his usual courage he faced alone an angry meeting of the Conservative Club while his name was being struck off the books. An Erastian in Church affairs, and of no persuasion at all in secular policy, a passion for law reform and better modes of legal education, and a deep love of Oxford, were almost his only interests beyond himself and his household. He was soon made Solicitor-General; and with Cockburn as Attorney smote Amalek hip and thigh. He bought a country estate, and became an assiduous if indifferent sportsman, occasionally peppering his friends and upbraiding someone else for the blunder. In 1861 he received the Great Seal in succession to Lord Campbell, and ascended the Woolsack followed by the admiring dislike of the whole Bar and most of the public. We know from the published Letters of Queen Victoria that her Majesty shared to the full in the popular view.

As a judge he gave general satisfaction, for he had Lord Halsbury's knack of getting through verbiage to facts, and through subtleties to principles. Like Lord Young, he detested precedents, and wished that all the law reports could be burned. But his career as Chancellor is more remarkable on the political than on the legal side, for his Erastianism found full scope in his struggle with what he regarded as clerical usurpation. In his judgment in the "Essays and Reviews" case, he "dismissed hell with costs, and took away from orthodox members of the Church of England their last hope of everlasting damnation." It was not so much what he did—for other lawyers and even



prelates agreed with him—as the way he did it. His conflicts with Bishop Wilberforce were characterized by an asperity which is happily rare in English public life. He treated the Episcopal Bench, to adopt a famous metaphor, as the Almighty might treat refractory black beetles. He was sometimes in the right on the merits and sometimes in the wrong, but he was always in the wrong on the methods. The result was that when his disgrace came, few felt any compunction at his fall. It is needless to repeat a story which is not wholly to his discredit. Though a great lawyer, he was far from being worldly-wise, and he fell into the hands of people more cunning than himself. He bore his misfortunes with a stoical dignity, and his farewell speech to the Lords reconciled many an old enemy. It did not reconcile Bishop Wilberforce, and we are bound to say that if the Chancellor was deficient in Christian charity he had more of that scarce commodity than the Churchman.

Mr. Frederic Harrison seems to be right in attributing the bitterness of Westbury's tongue less to direct malice than to an uncanny gift of ready epigrammatic speech. Everyone thinks hard thoughts, but Westbury was bound to utter his in polished English. He was inclined, like many clever men, to be intolerant of fools, but his intolerance at once took the form of stinging and unforgettable sarcasms. He was quite impartial in the distribution of these favours. An Irish junior asserted himself in consultation. "Really," said Bethell meditatively, "this loquacious savage appears to know some law." A timid junior once congratulated him on a speech and said, "I think

you have made a strong impression on the Court." "I think so too," was the answer; "do nothing to disturb it." A fellow-silk, who had a loud voice, finished his argument and sat down. Bethell arose: "Now that the noise in Court has subsided, I will tell your honour in two sentences the gist of the case." The judges were not spared. Lord Justice Knight Bruce, for example, was apt to be impatient. "Your lordship," said Bethell, "will hear my client's case first, and if your lordship thinks it right your lordship can express surprise afterwards." Once he turned to his junior in Court—"Take a note of that: his lordship says he will turn it over in what he is pleased to call his mind!" The Lords fared little better. "I perceive that the noble Duke is not listening—indeed I perceive that the noble Duke is asleep. The subject before your lordships is an intricate one, I admit, but if the noble Duke will lend me his attention I do not despair of making the matter clear even to his intellect." As for Bishops, he walked round their tent with a club, like the Irishman at Donnybrook, "looking for heads." "I would remind your lordships," he once said, "that the law in its infinite wisdom has already provided for the not improbable event of the imbecility of a bishop." Many of his gibes are merely rude, but we must remember that they were delivered in a dulcet voice, with a prim and measured accent, which greatly increased the effect. It is awesome to think that he once addressed a Young Men's Christian Association on the virtues of benevolence and charity, to which qualities he attributed the success of his career. Certainly he was a terrible old gentleman,



and yet his bark was much worse than his bite. Hating sentiment and moral protestations, he leaned too far to the other extreme. But the virtues at which he publicly scoffed he was apt to practise in private, and many a man had to thank this rough-tongued cynic for advice and help. Whatever his faults, he was a splendid clean-cut figure, with something antiseptic and bracing in his air. One such man is no bad tonic for a generation. "From my youth up," he once said, "I have truckled to no man, sought no man's favour." His courage never failed him to the end. He died in harness, sitting as arbitrator, with a bag of ice on his spine, on the very eve of his death.

## VII

# STYLE AND JOURNALISM



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## STYLE AND JOURNALISM<sup>1</sup>

THE SUBJECT WHICH I HAVE CHOSEN FOR MY address this afternoon may sound, I fear, to some of you like a paradox. To many people journalism stands as the exact opposite of literature, and the manner of writing of journalists, which they unkindly call "journalese," as the antithesis of all that is meant by style. To such my title may seem rather of the "snakes in Iceland" type, like a monograph on the railway system of Spitzbergen, or on the grace and urbanity of the Soviet Government. I do not share this view, or I should not be addressing you to-day.

We need waste no time over a definition of style. Let us call it simply the exact and adequate expression in words of a writer's meaning. The business of a writer is to get the full content of his mind across the barrier of personality to the mind of his reader. If that content is trite and barren, the style must be trite and barren also. If it is subtle, the style must be subtle and delicate; if it is charged with emotion and poetry and imagination, the style must reflect these qualities. It is easy to find writers who excel in rhetoric but fail in lucidity; there are books, on the other hand, which are clearness itself, but which cannot stimu-

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered to the School of Journalism in King's College, London, May 19, 1925.



late or move. The perfect workmanlike style will take on the colour of every mood of the writer's mind, as a clear lake reflects the colours of the sky. If you ask me for examples of perfect workmanlike style, I would take two nineteenth-century writers—Thomas Huxley and John Henry Newman. We know from their own confession what they aimed at. They had no other purpose except to make their meaning infallibly clear to the world, and, whatever form that meaning might take, they succeeded. You will find in both passages of noble eloquence and sudden lightning flashes of imagination, but above all you will find a beautiful clarity, so that the dullest is never in doubt as to what they mean. I have called such a style workmanlike, and that is, I think, the proper word. It is like a finely-tempered blade, fit for any use its owner desires. That, and not the more fanciful graces, is, to my mind, the supreme merit of style, and it is the merit which the journalist above all men should strive after, for it is his business to write on every kind of subject and in many manners, and what he needs is not a fancy-dress trinket but a practical tool.

At one time in our history there existed what might be called a canon in style, so that all educated people wrote on a certain fairly high level. The history of English prose is a curious thing. It would be true to say that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century saw the production of nobler prose than any other epoch in our literature. Then you had the Authorized Version of the Bible and Raleigh's *History of the World*; you had Jeremy Taylor and Bishop

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Hooker, and presently you had John Milton. Yet, at the very time when these masterpieces were being produced, the ordinary writing of English prose was in a parlous state. The common prose of the period was turgid, crabbed, and uncouth. It was still a weapon confined to the masters, and the plain man could only use it with difficulty. The truth is it was too stately a thing for human nature's daily task. A man could scarcely keep a diary or write letters to his lawyer or his wife in the style of Clarendon or Milton. It was Dryden who first made English prose easy and adaptable. You will see in his wonderful prefaces how its joints are slowly being loosened and suppld. At the end of the century and early in the eighteenth century English prose had become a handy thing—a thing not to be written elaborately like Latin elegiacs, but with a running pen, a thing which had much of the grace of the spoken word. Addison completed the process. He set his countrymen a standard eminently sensible and not too hard of attainment.

Now, notice that as soon as prose is simplified and relieved of the stiff gold brocade of the Elizabethans, journalism begins. You cannot write leading articles and essays and descriptive reports in the style of Jeremy Taylor or John Donne. All through the eighteenth century we have this excellent fixed normal English prose, a canon, as I have said, which every educated man adopted. If you look at the familiar letters which gentlefolk wrote to each other during that century you will find an extraordinarily high standard of clear, easy statement. It is a great thing to have a canon of this sort in carrying on our day-to-day life. The



eighteenth century is like a healthy tableland. Its prose has not the soaring peaks of the century before, but it avoids the Elizabethan and Jacobean morasses.

I do not feel that to-day we possess such a canon. Our letters, when we write them at all and do not dictate them, have no doubt merits of their own, but it can scarcely be said that there is a standard of accomplishment below which no educated man or woman falls, and we all of us know very clever people who write abominably. In our literature to-day prose tends to follow a hundred different models, and since it has no canon and each writer desires to make his style the expression of his temperament, we get a great deal of writing which is careless, fantastic, shapeless, and, to my conservative mind, undeniably bad. A scientist may have conclusions of the first importance to expound, but he too often is incapable of writing clear English. A philosopher—well, how many philosophers to-day can write as Hume and Berkeley wrote? Our historians have advanced in scholarship far beyond the Smolletts and Robertsons and Goldsmiths of the eighteenth century, but in how many cases is their learning obscured by their lack of skill in utterance? I do not say that we have not excellent writers to-day, but I feel bound to maintain that education does not with us, as it did with the Augustans, presume a gift of vigorous and graceful prose.

If there is a modern canon it is to be sought, I think, in journalism. I believe that English journalism shows at the present moment a higher level of competence than it has ever shown before



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in our history. We may miss the grace of an Addison or the fiery vigour of a Hazlitt or a Cobbett, but for a body of clear, effective, and urbane prose our journalism need fear no comparison with the past. It is my business to read a good many books in different branches of literature, and I confess that I turn often with comfort from the freakish, stuttering, self-conscious rigmarole of too many modern *littérateurs* to the clean-cut efficient prose of a newspaper article.

Whatever journalism lacks it does not lack style, but style in journalism has a specific meaning. It is not, or it should not be, the style of the essayist, the philosopher, the preacher, the historian. Good journalism should be what the French call a *causerie*; it should not be too formal; it should not always be finely dressed; it should have something of the ease and the spontaneity of the living voice. This, I think, applies to every branch of the journalist's profession, from a report or a descriptive article to a leader. The essential virtues of style for these purposes are that it should be clear, that it should be arresting, and that it should be well-bred. It should have in it that which attracts the reader's attention and conciliates his interest, and above all things its meaning should be unmistakable. I am not talking about those base occasions which now and then arise when a writer has to spin out an article in order to fill a certain space, or where an editor, being anxious not to commit himself, is deliberately obscure. I am talking about the profession at its best and most useful, where the aim is to interest and inform, or, it may be, to convince, the reader. For obvious reasons it would be an invidious thing

for me to give you examples. But examples lie ready to your hand, and if you wish to find a canon of journalistic style—that undress style which is necessary for this particular task—you will find it almost any day in the columns of our great London and provincial dailies and our best weekly journals.

I am speaking to young men who look forward themselves to practising this profession. I have told you that the profession possesses at the moment a large number of admirable practitioners whose work you will be well advised to study and follow. But I think it would be more helpful if instead of enlarging upon the good qualities of style in journalism I were to warn you against certain dangers. For dangers there are, pitfalls in style for the journalist quite different from those which beset the path of the man of letters in his library. The journalist is compelled to work fast; he is compelled to switch his mind from one subject to another, and constantly to change his mood; he has to catch the attention of readers often as hurried as himself; he has to be clear and emphatic, and the subject may scarcely permit of either clearness or emphasis. Therefore he is in danger of falling into vices which are, so to speak, the exaggeration of his virtues. I propose, with your permission, to discuss a few of these dangers with you in order that you may beacon them and avoid them. They are perils which to a large extent lie in wait for every writer, and I know that they are faults of which I am constantly guilty myself.



## STYLE AND JOURNALISM

### I

The first danger I would warn you against is that of over-picturesqueness. Picturesqueness is of the essence of good journalism, but it must be the picturesqueness which is appropriate to the occasion. I have shrunk from giving you a definition of style, but at this point I can scarcely refrain from quoting a great master on the subject. This is how Cicero defines the good speaker: "That man has true eloquence who can deal summarily with small things, moderately with moderate matters, weightily with great matters; who can adapt his oratory to the appropriate ends. Whatever his subject is he will speak becomingly on it—not meagrely when it is full-bodied, not meanly when it is great, not in one way when it demands another, but will keep his style equal and adequate to his subject." Over-picturesqueness sins against this first virtue of propriety, for the writing is too high-powered for the subject matter. You will find this vice particularly, I think, in political journalism. I remember that in 1906, when a Liberal Government first came into power after many years in opposition, Liberal journalists were inclined to model their style upon the Book of Revelation. The most trivial disputes were displayed as a battle between the followers of Light and Darkness, of Christ and anti-Christ. Every Liberal oration was a trumpet-call; every Conservative rejoinder a muttering from the pit, or the babbling of an idiot. I think this was a vice of style rather than a perversity of mind, for I knew various worthy gentlemen who wrote like



that, and they certainly did not take the melodramatic view of their country's politics which one might have gathered from their writings. In the same way, to take an instance from the other side, I have seen honest men write of Imperialism with a falsetto pitch which in the case of one reader, at any rate, produced a violent reaction against the very name of Empire. In the war there were correspondents who, in the search for picturesqueness, offended against every canon of taste and style, and made the unfortunate soldier blush when he read their articles. It is easy to see how the fault arises. A journalist desires to be vivid and arresting. If he really feels enthralled and stimulated by his subject he will probably write well. But if he is feeling tired and bored, he will fall into a mechanical picturesqueness full of outrageous adjectives and irrelevant colour.

It is a fault for two reasons. In the first place it produces a false impression, which is bad journalism. In the second place it will degrade the author's talent, so that he may render himself incapable for ever of true picturesqueness. If you write about a tea-party with a pen dipped in thunder and eclipse, what are you going to do when you have to describe some tremendous spectacle? If you make a world-shaking crisis out of some trivial incident, how are you going to impress people when the real crisis comes? If you are perpetually shouting "Wolf! wolf!" you will have no voice left when the genuine wolf-pack is after you. If you begin every third leading article with "England stands to-day at the parting of the ways," you have left no more shots in your locker. The picturesque, the apocalyptic,

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the sublime, should all be found in the journalist's equipment, but they must not be squandered; they must be kept, to return to Cicero's word, for the "appropriate" occasion.

Now, gentlemen, I am inclined to think that in this respect we have very greatly improved within the last quarter of a century. I do not know if you remember the writings of George Steevens, who was the *Daily Mail* correspondent in Lord Kitchener's advance to Omdurman, and who died of fever two years later in Ladysmith. Steevens happened to be a sound scholar, and he raised war correspondence to a fine art. His book, *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, is one of the best accounts of a campaign ever written, for the style is wholly appropriate. He saw clearly, and wrote down exactly what he saw with a minimum of adjectives, and the result is that the reader almost smells the powder. It is the same with other branches of journalism. Foolish picturesqueness should be left to the lower ranks of the politicians. It seems to me that there is a very high degree of moderation and balance and restraint in our better newspapers; but if you want an example of the vice I recommend to you a little book of Matthew Arnold's called *Friendship's Garland*, published in 1871. At that time the *Daily Telegraph* was a very different paper from what it is to-day. It made a speciality of flamboyance, and there were certain journalists, now almost forgotten, like Hepworth Dixon and George Augustus Sala, who revelled in noisy, high-coloured prose. Against that mannerism Matthew Arnold directs his delicate satire. He praises it with his tongue in his cheek, as "blending the airy epicureanism of the *salons* of



Augustus with the full-bodied gaiety of our English Cider-cellar." His friend, Leo Adolens of the *Daily Telegraph*, gives us many examples of this style, and the Prussian exponent of *Geist*, Arminius, describes it as "middle-class Macaulayese." "I call it Macaulayese," he says, "because it has the same internal and external characteristics as Macaulay's style, the external characteristic being the hard metallic movement with nothing of the soft play of life, and the internal characteristic being a perpetual semblance of hitting the right nail on the head without the reality. And I call it middle-class, because it has these faults without the compensation of great studies and of conversance with great affairs, by which Macaulay partly redeemed them." To-day we put a higher value on Macaulay's style, I think, than Matthew Arnold did, but he has accurately described the vice to which I am directing your attention. He invents one magnificent example—a sentence from an imaginary obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*. "In the Garden of the Hesperides the inscrutable-eyed Sphinx whispers, with half-parted lips, Mysteries more than Eleusinian of the Happy Dead." You could not get a better instance of false sublimity; it sounds tremendous, but it is fudge.

## II

The second fault I would warn you against is the fault of slovenliness—a fault to which busy men, writing often in a hurry, are peculiarly prone. It is not exactly mistakes in plain

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grammar, like singular verbs and plural nouns, or mistakes in the refinements of grammar, like split infinitives and the use of "and which" without a preceding relative (a mistake which, I may remark in passing, you will find on almost every page of Thackeray). It is rather a steady undercurrent of inaccuracy, a frequent misapprehension of the exact meaning of certain nouns and adjectives, a perpetual lack of care and precision. The most conspicuous case, of course, is the mixture of metaphors. The classic ground for this fault is, I fancy, the journalism of our Indian Empire. There is the famous case of the gentleman who, in reporting the death of a mother, declared that "The hand that rocked the cradle has kicked the bucket." We do not find anything as good as this in our own papers, but I have often found a metaphoric mixture, chiefly when the writer begins with a metaphor and then has some parenthetical clause and forgets before the end what exactly his metaphor was.

But that is a form of the fault which can be easily guarded against. Far more insidious is the slightly inaccurate use of familiar words. I have noticed in the last fortnight in papers of the highest repute three instances which I will give you. The first is the misuse of the adverb "singularly." When I say that a man has a "singular" gift I mean that he is the single solitary man who possesses it. If I say that a football player is singularly clever, I ought to mean that his cleverness is unique and that nobody else has anything quite like it. But you will find in our press to-day "singularly" constantly used as if it meant only "in a high degree." The pianist is singularly



talented, that statesman is singularly eloquent, when what is meant is that the pianist is rather good, and the statesman has made quite an effective speech. In the interests of the purity of the English tongue let us protest against this misuse. A second case is the phrase "it seems evident." As it stands this is tautology. "It seems" and "it is evident" have exactly the same meaning. What the writer wants to say is that it "seems certain" or it "seems likely,"—something quite different. A third example is the use of "unique." Now, "unique" is an absolute word admitting of no degrees of comparison; it means that something is the only thing of its kind in existence. You can say that Mount Everest is unique in height; you can say, if you like, that Mr. Baldwin or Mr. Ramsay Macdonald is unique among modern statesmen in virtue. But you cannot allow phrases like "Mr. X is a more unique performer than Mr. Y," when you mean that he has more originality.

The worst offender, I think, is the word "literally." When I say that a man was "literally shot to pieces" I mean to convey that that was precisely what happened in the physical sense; that the phrase is not used, as it often is, metaphorically, about some spiritual or social experience. And yet how often do we read that "Mr. A was literally stricken dumb," when the writer does not mean that Mr. A suffered an unpleasant miracle, but that for a few moments he was at a loss for a reply. The danger comes from the use of metaphorical phrases, usually from Shakespeare, which have become so part of our casual speech that their metaphorical origin is for-

gotten. The other day I read in a reputable newspaper, in a report of Parliamentary proceedings, that the Government "literally escaped by the skin of their teeth." I can only say that I wish I had been there to see. My imagination boggles at the picture of the Government beset by a horde of fiery enemies intent upon their bodily destruction, and only separated at one moment by less than the breadth of a hair from death; or another picture of Ministers violently assaulted in the face, and in their escape leaving behind them some indescribably fragile dental covering.

### III

The third vice is one which I am afraid is more common to-day than in the past. We may call it the vice of abstraction. The interest of the nineteenth century in theological, philosophical, and scientific problems brought into journalism a very large number of abstract phrases, and it is hard to get them out again. In our own day the development of the cult of psycho-analysis has introduced a fresh set. Now the worst of abstract phrases is that they are ineffective and obscure. They are ineffective, because it is the concrete detail which really catches the reader's attention, and they are obscure because very often the words are incapable of a precise definition, and their use by writers is merely a cloak for looseness and confusion of thought and intellectual laziness. If you turn to the great English writers you will notice how a man like Edmund Burke, even when writ-



ing on some matter of abstract speculation, manages all the time to keep his style concrete, and, consequently, his thought clear. The best writing, both in poetry and prose, is full of particulars; the worst is woolly and abstract. Now it is the special duty of the journalist who wishes to arrest his reader's attention to shun abstractions and vague philosophical phrases. He is not writing metaphysics, where there is a legitimate professional language. He is writing for the ordinary man. Let him, therefore, be chary about all kinds of spurious counters—"isms" and "ologies," inhibitions, complexes, repressions; and let him say what he has to say in the simple and vivid language of our ordinary life. Unless your object is to avoid the law of libel do not say that a man has a "complex of misappropriation," but that he is a thief; do not say that he "dabbles in terminological inexactitudes," but that he is a liar. Do not, I beseech you, turn the first sentence in the Scots Shorter Catechism, "Man's chief end is to glorify God," into "The supreme objective of humanity is to further the realization of the Absolute Will," which does not mean so much, if it means anything. The English language has a noble concreteness not to be paralleled, I think, by any other tongue, and it is our business to take advantage of what the gods have given us. I am inclined to think that more good writing has been spoiled by sudden lapses into abstraction than by any other fault of style.

## IV

The fourth fault is a rather complicated one, which we may call jargon. Every profession tends to develop a speech of its own made up of a number of desiccated phrases which have come to be mere counters and have lost the freshness of the living language. Solicitors, for example, have their jargon, and since they very often do not really try to say what they mean, but simply fit a number of jargon phrases together, their letters are obscure and lead to trouble in the Law Courts. Business men—the great majority at any rate—have invented a very hideous and wooden jargon. Mr. Smith wants to tell Mr. Brown that he has received his letter and would like to talk to him about it. Instead of writing:

“DEAR SIR,—I have your letter of 27th April, and will come and see you about it next Monday at ten o’clock.”

he writes something like this:

“*Re* the above noted matter. We have received your esteemed communication of 27th inst., with regard to which there are certain points which occur to us as relative to the same. Our Mr. Smith will do himself the honour of waiting upon you on Monday, the 2nd prox., in the hope of elucidating certain particulars. It is understood that this letter and the action proposed are without prejudice between our good selves.”

Now, that is simply rigmarole. It says nothing which could not have been said in two lines. I noticed the other day that a distinguished city magnate defended this style on the ground that



business men had no time for literary tricks. But the trouble is that this kind of writing is full of literary tricks, only they are bad ones, and it is a shocking waste of time as well as an outrage on the King's English. Why are these strong, silent, over-worked people so incredibly feeble and verbose in their epistolary style?

You will find, as I have said, jargon in every profession. It is exceedingly bad in Government departments, as anyone will admit who has had a controversy with the authorities of the Inland Revenue. It is rampant in blue books and Government reports. It is very common in the Army, as those of you who served in the late war will remember. Jargon is not only incapable of honest brevity, but it is utterly lacking in clearness. The reader has often to think many times before he can understand what the writer is driving at. Journalism, I fear, has developed a jargon of its own, and that jargon is properly called "journalese." It is a specially flagrant vice in journalism, for lawyers and business men and Government officials are not professionally engaged in the use of words, whereas it is the journalist's own craft, and he ought to respect his weapons.

The essence of journalistic jargon is that it uses phrases which may at one time have been fresh and vivid, but which are so staled by long use that all their vigour has departed. The journalist, too, seems to have an affection for a certain kind of word which he regards as a "boss" word, as Mr. Pinkerton in *The Wrecker* regarded the word "hebdomadary," and drags it in on every possible occasion. Now it is very dangerous to be dog-

matic about new words and phrases. If you turn up any volume of memoirs written at the end of the eighteenth or early in the nineteenth century you will find bitter complaints of new words which were creeping into use, and which the complainants thought ugly and vulgar. These words to-day are probably an honourable part of the English language. The young gentlemen from the Universities must have thought Shakespeare a very vulgar innovator in his language, but what would English literature be without Shakespeare's colossal novelties? Therefore I am not going to complain about certain journalistic words, even though personally I do not like them, words such as "glimpse" and "sense," used as verbs. But we are entitled to complain if words are used which have no justification on the ground of convenience, and which are simply cumbrous pedantries, when plain, simple English would be far better. I beseech you, gentlemen, do not say "elect" when you can say "choose," or "actualities" when you mean "facts," and under no circumstances use such hideous and inaccurate Latinisms as "eventuate" and "transpire."

But I think the worst form of jargon is the use of old, stale quotations and echoes of old, stale jokes. The man who first said that somebody was "of the male persuasion" said something funny, but to constantly repeat it gets on one's nerves. Why must every foundation be "well and truly laid"? Why must we call women "the softer sex"? Why must we never speak of the body except as "the human form divine"? Why must we have constant Latin tags, such as *coram populo*



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and *cui bono*? the latter, by the way, nearly always used incorrectly. Why are we so shadowed by words like "adumbrate"? Why are we so obsessed by the word "obsess"? Why must any novel incident "give us furiously to think"? Why, instead of saying "no," must we say "the answer is in the negative"? Why must we declare that "the psychological moment" has come, when we merely mean that there is a good chance? Why, above all, must we cumber up our writing with phrases like "in the case of," "with regard to," "in these respects," "in such circumstances," and all that adipose tissue of style? It is a bad fault in journalism and should be carefully guarded against; but it is the vice of many writers who have not the excuse of a busy journalist. I opened at random the other day a book of dispatches from an Indian Viceroy. There was a sentence in which what he meant to say was, "I am not clear about the causes of the frontier trouble." What he did say was, "With regard to the origins of the circumstances which have eventuated in the unrest in North-West India, I am not yet in a position to pronounce upon their material significance." There, in the case of a man of great ability, you have jargon at its worst.

### V

The fifth fault I would have you avoid turns upon the misuse of similes and synonyms. It is not that these similes and synonyms are in-

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accurately used, but that there is too much of them. You all remember the old-fashioned sporting journalism, for which I have a certain weakness. You remember how a prize fight used to be described. Blood was never blood, but "claret," or "manly ichor." The mouth was the "box of ivories," the stomach the "bread basket," and so on. You remember the old descriptions of a cricket match, when the sun was always "Old Sol," and the rain always "Jupiter Pluvius," and a bat "the willow." I confess to a sentimental liking for that noisy, preposterous, robust mannerism, and when it was used by scholars, as it used to be in the old *Pink 'Un* in the days of Mr. John Corlett, it was often extraordinarily effective. But it is not to be recommended as a manner for general use; it is too restless; and when it is applied to other subjects than sport it is apt to be comic. To-day it survives chiefly in the passion for unnecessary variation. Up to a point the instinct is sound. If you are writing about a well-known man it is awkward to be always repeating his name. It is legitimate enough in writing about Mr. Baldwin to call him sometimes "Mr. Baldwin" and sometimes "The Prime Minister," and sometimes "the head of the British Government." But if you go on to describe him also as the "sturdy Worcestershire squire," or, as I have seen it done, "our modern Sir Roger de Coverley," or "that celebrated devotee of my Lady Nicotine," you become ridiculous. Shakespeare seems to suffer especially from this trick. How often do we find him in one short column called "immortal Will," or "our greatest dramatist," or "the swan of Avon," and given as many



endearing epithets as if he were a pet lamb?

Now mark how this fault arises. Its source is a sound instinct: the fear of being clumsy and banal. But there is no greater clumsiness than is to be found in these far-fetched synonyms, and no worse banality than this coyness about a plain name. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has a delightful passage in one of his books, describing an undergraduate's essay on Byron. "My undergraduate," he says, "has a blushing sense that to call Byron Byron twice on one page is indelicate. So Byron, after starting bravely as Byron, in the second sentence turns into 'that great but unequal poet,' and thenceforward I have as much trouble with Byron as ever Telemachus with Proteus to hold and pin him back to his proper self. Half-way down the page he becomes 'the gloomy master of Newstead': overleaf he is reincarnated into 'the meteoric darling of society': and so proceeds through successive avatars—'this arch-rebel,' 'the author of *Childe Harold*,' 'the apostle of scorn,' 'the ex-Harroviau, proud, but abnormally sensitive of his club-foot,' 'the martyr of Missolonghi,' 'the pageant-monger of a bleeding heart.' " This kind of thing is as laborious to read as to write, for instead of taking a straight course it staggers from one side of the road to the other. It is like George Meredith's "homing drunkard," incapable of taking two steps in a straight line.

## VI

With this I close my Chamber of Horrors. There are many more pitfalls in writing, worse, perhaps, than any I have mentioned—pitfalls of preciousness and affectation; but these are more likely to beset the leisured man of letters than the busy journalist. The five rocks I have beacons are those that lie more directly in the course of those whom I am addressing to-day. If we want to give them names let us call them *false picturesqueness, slovenliness, abstractness, jargon, and unnecessary variation.*

Now, to make my meaning clear I want to read to you a specimen of good, competent prose, and then to see how it can be spoiled by those various faults I have mentioned. I had thought of taking a passage from the *Pilgrim's Progress*, but there is a slight archaism in Bunyan's style which makes it unsuitable for purposes of comparison. I will take instead a passage from Matthew Arnold. It is not great prose, but it is good prose, honest, workmanlike stuff, conveying exactly what the writer means, and it deals with the kind of topic on which many of you will some day be called upon to write. Its subject is the relation of knowledge of life to poetry, as shown in the contrast between Byron and Goethe:

"Everyone can see that a poet ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry; and, life and the world being in modern times very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great critical effort behind it; else it must be a com-



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paratively poor, barren, and short-lived affair. This is why Byron's poetry had so little endurance in it, and Goethe's so much; both Byron and Goethe had a great productive power, but Goethe's was nourished by a great critical effort providing the true materials for it, and Byron's was not; Goethe knew life and the world, the poet's necessary subjects, much more comprehensively and thoroughly than Byron. He knew a great deal more of them, and he knew them much more as they really are."

Now let us see how this would be handled in the *false picturesque* style:

"Before a poet dips his pen in ink he should have fleshed his sword in the battle of life; he cannot retire to his singing bower save with the dust of the arena upon him. He must have felt the beating of the deep heart of humanity, if the infinite future is to pulsate in his music. The true Hesperides cannot be attained save by an Odyssey more stern than that of Ulysses through the cities and the islands of men, and among the tempest-tossed seas of reality. Byron wrapped himself in his singing mantle and coldly withdrew from the mêlée of common life; Goethe kept his place in the ranks, shared their hopes and fears, and through humility and discipline attained that beauty which never falls to those who avert their faces from truth. The proud inward-turning eyes of the one dwelt on the narrow orbit of his emotions; the calm, clear gaze of the other had all life and eternity for its prospect. It is but a hothouse beauty which draws no nurture from the rude winds and the stony soil of the workaday world."

Not perhaps so bad of its kind, but unfortunately it is the wrong kind for this particular topic. Matthew Arnold's plain prose makes the point far more gracefully and clearly.

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Now for the second, the *slovenly* :

"It is a truism that a poet should know life before he can write of it; if he is to reproduce it in his work he must literally be immersed in its tides. If he is forgetful of this truth his work will be singularly poor and uniquely barren. Byron forgot it and it seems evident that his fame is already passing; Goethe remembered it and so advances from strength to strength. Both writers had the impulse of genius, but Goethe's was fed by thought and watered by knowledge, whereas Byron's was beating its wings in the void."

There you have a riot of slovenliness—the wrong use of "literally" and "singularly" and "uniquely," the tautology of "it seems evident," and the mixture of metaphors at the close.

The third fault, you remember, was *abstractness*. Here is Matthew Arnold in that manner :

"It is obvious that the poet must have an objective sense of reality before he can attain to subjective inspiration, and owing to the complexity and involution of the raw material of his art this knowledge must be quantitatively large and qualitatively profound. Byron and Goethe both began with the primal impulse to create, but Byron's universe of comprehension was narrow and barren and unrelated, whereas Goethe subsumed into his a rich manifold of concrete experience. Not only was this manifold far richer in the case of the German than of the English poet, but it was more highly differentiated, and constituted a more organic part of his intellectual outlook."

It should be noted that in one way that is tolerable prose, since the abstract terms are accurately used and it is reasonably succinct. It would pass in a work of philosophy, but it will not do for journalism, since to nine people out of ten it would



be unintelligible. The point can be better made in simpler language.

The fourth fault was *jargon*. Here is Matthew Arnold in the kind of jargon we call "journallese."

"It is the business of a poet to glimpse the immensity of the world and sense the complexity of life, and not to be over-obsessed by his personal outlook. Behold the contrast between Byron and Goethe. The Englishman habitually visualized his own narrow soul; the German transcended his *ego* so that the world materialized for him. That is the true inwardness of Goethe's greatness, and it gives us furiously to think. In respect of life Byron elected to confine himself to those aspects which flattered his own vanity; with regard to the other, Goethe took, in the great words of Lord Bacon, 'all knowledge for his province.' The consequence is that while the one is to-day little more than a chimera *bombinans in vacuo*, the other still with a large gesture lays his spell upon all who would explore the avenues of the future. His vision of reality is at once wider and more authentic and essential."

That is jargon triumphant: worn *clichés* like "obsessed," "visualized," "true inwardness," "gives us furiously to think," "authentic," "essential" — the trite quotation from Bacon (who is miscalled) — needless Latinisms like "*ego*" and "*bombinans in vacuo*" — stale or ugly modern usages like "glimpse," "sense," "elected," "gesture," "explore."

Last, I give you Matthew Arnold in the style of *elegant variation*. This example sticks very closely to his text:

"Everyone can see that a poet should know life and the world before he tunes his lyre, and since humanity and the universe are in these strenuous days matters of

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some complexity the work of a modern bard must have behind it a wide dialectic if it is not soon to be a withered rose in the garden of the Muses. That is why the poetic web of Byron, as contrasted with that of Goethe, has so little of the stuff of endurance. The Pilgrim of the Ages, equally with the Sage of Weimar, had a strong creative impulse; but the German had the ministering angels of knowledge to bring him largesse, and the Anglo-Saxon was without such celestial visitants. The Teutonic master knew life and the world, which are the raw materials of poetry, far more fully and truly than the British aristocrat."

That is how they do it. A "poet" is, of course, also a "bard"; his work is "tuning the lyre," or "a rose in a garden of the Muses," or a "poetic web"; Goethe is the "Sage of Weimar," the "German," and the "Teutonic master," Byron the "Pilgrim of the Ages," the "Anglo-Saxon," and the "British aristocrat."

## VII

I would repeat in conclusion what is the golden rule for all writing, whether it be the work of journalist or poet, philosopher or historian. It is to put into words your full and exact meaning as simply as possible. If your meaning is intricate, imaginative, sublime, or merely prosaic, the style in which you write must in each case be appropriate—in other words, it must fully express it. But I would add this warning: before you can apply that rule you must have a meaning to convey. He who has nothing to say may be gifted by Providence with the tongues of men and of



angels and yet will produce indifferent matter. I am inclined to explain the merits of the prose of men of action not only by the fact that they have not staled their minds by constant writing, but also because they never take a pen in hand except when they have something vital to say. They always mean a great deal, and that meaning seems to find the appropriate words.

I have tried to make a few suggestions to you which may be helpful in your training for your future profession. That profession is one for which I have a strong respect. It is a profession which is daily becoming of greater social and political importance. It is a profession, too, which I think possesses a very high standard of responsibility and honour. A good journalist is and must be full of loyalties. He has his duty to his country, to his paper, to the traditions of his craft. To these duties and loyalties I suggest that you add another—a scrupulous regard for what is one of the most sacred possessions of our people, the English language and the great canons of our English literature.

VIII  
CERTAIN POETS



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## CERTAIN POETS

### I

#### SCOTS VERNACULAR POETRY<sup>1</sup>

THE TEUTONIC SPEECH OF NORTHERN ENGLAND WAS brought into Scotland by the first Anglian settlers, and acquired throughout the succeeding centuries certain minor but clearly marked peculiarities. When Scots literature begins towards the close of the fourteenth century, it is written in a tongue substantially the same as the Northern dialect of Early English, which was the speech current north of the Humber. Gradually a literary language was formed, akin to, but not the same as, the spoken tongue, and this literary language was influenced by Chaucer and the poets of the South. But presently the Midland dialect became the only literary language in England, and the Northern dialect drew further away from it and followed a path of its own. The early Scots writers, like Barbour and Wyntoun, wrote what was virtually Northern English. The *Kingis Quair* of James I., though written originally in Southern English, was northernized by the copyists; Henryson's language was little affected by the south; then,

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *The Northern Muse: An Anthology of Scots Vernacular Poetry*. Nelson, 1924.



as the Middle Scots period develops, we find Dunbar and Gawain Douglas and Sir David Lyndsay using a language of their own—Northern English in stock, with a slight French element, and a strong kinship with the spoken tongue of the Lowlands, which had developed its own idiosyncrasies. But to every Scots writer, however robust his patriotism, his speech was “English,”<sup>1</sup> and Dunbar calls Chaucer “of our Inglisch all the lycht.”<sup>2</sup> Gawain Douglas, indeed, claims to be a “Scottis” and not an “Inglis” poet, but he confessed himself forced to use some “Sudroun” words,<sup>3</sup> and his work, though it accepts more from the spoken vernacular, is in the same tradition as that of the other “makars,” so that Lyndsay could speak of him as “in our Inglis rethorick the rose.” A stout Scots nationalist like Hume of Godscroft, who lived at the close of the sixteenth century, might maintain that he wrote his Scottish mother-tongue, and that he had “ever accounted it a mean study to learn to read or speak English . . . esteeming it but a dialect of our own, and that (perhaps) more corrupt.”<sup>4</sup> But his claim was a mere juggling with words.

Perhaps the process might be thus summarily and broadly stated. The Scots speech was in its beginnings the Northern dialect of English, which, as a spoken tongue, soon acquired minor local

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the *Wallace* (IX, 295-297) of Thomas de Longueville:

“Lykly he was, manlik of countenance,  
Lik to the Scottis be mekill governance,  
Saiff off his tong, for Inglis had he nane.”

<sup>2</sup> *The Golden Targe*.

<sup>3</sup> Prologue to *Eneados*, Book I.

<sup>4</sup> Preface to the *History of the Houses of Douglas and Angus*.

differences. When it came to be written, it was the language of Northern England, and, though influenced to some extent by the South, it remained Northern. It was a literary speech, coloured by French and Latin, but it kept its affinities with the spoken vernacular and borrowed from it, being perhaps not much further removed from it than any book language is from that spoken in street and ale-house. As the Midland dialect became the literary language of England, Scots preserved its Northern quality and drew farther apart, developing powers and beauties of its own, though much clogged by an imperfect assimilation of its borrowings. It called itself English, but it was a substantive national speech, and its literature was a national literature, close enough to the common people to be intelligible to them, and yet capable of treating all themes from the homeliest to the highest. Had circumstances been different Scots might have developed into a true world-speech, "perhaps," as Mr. Henderson says, "more than rivalling literary English in fertility of idioms, and in wealth, beauty, and efficacy of diction," or Southern and Northern might have united in one majestic stream.

But the sixteenth century brought a sharp fissure. The chief disruptive agent was the Reformation, which in Scotland not only involved a more violent breach with the past than elsewhere, but put secular literature under a ban and cut at the root of vernacular art and song. It led to a severance with France and a closed contact with England. It made the chief reading of Scotland the Bible—in English; it gave her the metrical Psalms—in English; and its great pro-



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tagonists, like John Knox, had so many English affiliations that they were accused by their enemies of being "triple traitoris quha . . . knappis suddrone."<sup>1</sup> The making of verse ceased to be a pastime of people strongly troubled about their souls, and the few who still practised the art turned, like the poets of the *Deliciæ Poetarum Scotorum*, to Latin, or, like Drummond of Hawthornden, Aytoun, and Alexander, to the courtly muse of Edmund Spenser. The tongue which was spoken at kirk and market went out of literature for a century and more, and when it returned it was no longer as a national speech, but as a modish exercise. Politics, theology, a little law, and less history held the boards in seventeenth century Scotland, and their language was for the best part an ungainly English.

There was a revival early in the eighteenth century at the hands of Allan Ramsay, but its motive was antiquarian. The very men who laboured to expunge all Scotticisms from their prose and polished their Augustan couplets as their serious contribution to letters, turned a curious eye back to their own sixteenth century, and Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany* and *Ever Green* were the consequence. We owe much to this antiquarian interest, for it preserved the old poetry when it was in imminent danger of perishing. Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius* appeared in 1725; and following on the publication of Bishop Percy's *Reliques* came a flood of invaluable miscellanies, such as Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs* (1769), Pinkerton's two volumes of *Ballads* (1781 and 1783), Johnson's

<sup>1</sup> John Hamilton's *Catholik Traictise*, 1581.

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*Musical Museum* (1787), culminating in Sir Walter Scott's great *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3). The vernacular had become a book tongue to be studied and annotated; but when its students had anything to say, they said it in that English which was now the common speech of the literate from Devon to Aberdeen.

But Scots had one season of flowering left to it so splendid that it is hard to believe that the blossoms were the product of artificial tending and not the indigenous growth of the fields. Burns is by universal admission one of the most natural of poets, but he used a language which was, even in his own day, largely exotic. His Scots was not the living speech of his countrymen, like the English of Shelley, and—in the main—the Scots of Dunbar; it was a literary language subtly blended from the old "makars" and the refrains of folk poetry, much tintured with the special dialect of Ayrshire, and with a solid foundation of English, accented *more Boreali*. No Scot in the later eighteenth century, whether in Poosie Nansie's or elsewhere, spoke exactly as Burns wrote. Perhaps the plain speech of a people can never be the language of poetry, but a speech so limited and specialized as the spoken vernacular of eighteenth-century Scotland could scarcely suffice for the needs of a great poet. Burns, as he was bound to be, was retrospective and antiquarian in his syntax and vocabulary. He created a noble poetic diction, but it was a creation, not the reproduction of a speech still in the ears of men.

A century and a half have passed since Burns wrote, and the vernacular, confined to an ever-



narrowing province, has suffered a further detri-  
 tion. Old words and constructions have lapsed  
 from use; modes of speech which were current  
 so late as thirty years ago among the shepherds  
 of Ettrick and Galloway are scarcely intelligible  
 to their successors; in the towns the patois bids  
 fair to become merely a broadened and dilapidated  
 English; and though the dwellers north of Tweed  
 will be eternally distinguishable from their neigh-  
 bours by certain idiosyncrasies of speech, these  
 idiosyncrasies will be of voice and accent, and not  
 of language. The Scots vernacular ceased in the  
 sixteenth century to be a language in the full sense,  
 capable of being used on all varieties of theme,  
 and was confined to the rustic and the parochial;  
 capable, indeed, in the hands of a master of sound-  
 ing the depths of the human heart, but ill suited  
 to the infinite variety of human life. Even from  
 this narrowed orbit it has fallen, and is now little  
 more than a robust rendering of colloquial  
 English. The literary Scots which Burns wrote  
 is more than ever a literary tongue, far removed  
 from any speech in common use. It is understood  
 by many, not because it is in their ears from hear-  
 ing, but because it is in their memories from read-  
 ing. To restore the Scots vernacular is beyond  
 the power of any Act of Parliament, because the  
 life on which it depended has gone. Thirty years  
 ago I learned in the Tweedside glens to talk a Scots  
 which was then the speech of a people secluded  
 from the modern world; to-day if I spoke it at a  
 Tweedsmuir clipping I should find only a few old  
 men to understand me. Scots can survive only  
 as a book-tongue, and it is to that purpose that  
 I would bespeak the efforts of my countrymen.

The knowledge of the book-tongue is still fairly common, and if, in the mill of a standardized education, it should ever be crushed out, we shall lose the power of appreciating not only the "makars," but the best part of the Ballads, Burns, and Sir Walter Scott—that part of our literary heritage which is most intimately and triumphantly our own.

It follows that the Scots poets since Burns have been retrospective, as he was. They are all of them, from the minor bards of *Whistle Binkie* to Stevenson and Mrs. Jacob and Mr. Charles Murray, exponents of a literary convention and not singers in the speech of the common day. That is not to say that their art is not fresh and spontaneous, for art may work through conventions and yet be free. Poetry, composed with infinite pains from a thousand echoes, may have the sound of the natural voice, and to this virtue I think some of our modern Scots verse attains. It is always an exercise, the fruit of care and scholarship, and since the literary tongue is so nobly pedigreed, it will preserve (so long as it has an audience to understand it) a flavour and a grace which make it the fittest medium for a Scot to express certain moods and longings. It will be least successful when it is too antiquarian and becomes a mere clot of coagulated dialect, or when it attempts to reproduce phonetically a spoken word which is too disintegrated for literature. It must always be in a sense a *pastiche*, but that is not inimical to artistic excellence. Nevertheless—let us regretfully face the fact—the *pastiche* is not a growth of enduring vitality, and it has the further drawback that its appeal is circumscribed



owing to the lack of any canon of vernacular Scots. Every shire has its variant. If we call Sir Walter Scott's version the classic standard, what are we to make of Burns? And if the Border speech is metropolitan, is Mr. Charles Murray provincial?

There is a sentence in a letter of Burns to George Thomson<sup>1</sup> which seems to me to point a way to the true future of Scots in our literature. "There is a *naïveté*," he wrote, "a pastoral simplicity in a slight admixture of Scots words and phraseology which is more in unison—at least to my taste, and, I would add, to any genuine Caledonian taste—with the simple pathos or rustic sprightliness of our native music, than any English verses whatever." He was speaking only of songs to be set to old airs, but the words have a wider application. It is to be noted that in some of the greatest masterpieces of our tongue, in the Ballads, in Burns's "Ae Fond Kiss," in Scott throughout—in "Proud Maisie," in "Wandering Willie's Tale," in the talk of Jeanie Deans—the dialect is never emphasized; only a word here and there provides a Northern tone. I can imagine a Scottish literature of both verse and prose based on this "slight admixture," a literature which should be, in Mr. Gregory Smith's admirable phrase, "a delicate colouring of standard English with Northern tints." In such work the drawbacks of the *pastiche* would disappear; because of its Northern colouring it would provide the means for an expression of the racial temperament, and because it was also English, and one of the great

<sup>1</sup> January 26, 1793. I owe the quotation to Mr. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature*.

world-speeches, no limits would be set to its range and appeal.

From what has been written it follows that Scots poetry after the sixteenth century has not the width and variety of a national literature, covering all the moods of life and thought. Judged by his scope, Dunbar is its greatest figure. He has been differently estimated; Mr. Russell Lowell thought him a bore—"He who is national enough to like thistles may browse there to his heart's content"; Mr. Andrew Lang was tepid in his praise; Sir Walter Scott, on the other hand, thought him the greatest Scots poet before Burns; and the friends of the late W. P. Ker will remember with what gusto he used to declare, "Dunbar is *my* poet." To me he seems to rank with the Ballads, Burns, and the Waverley Novels as one of the four of Scotland's main contributions to letters. In any case it will not be disputed that the "makars" alone essayed and succeeded in the grand manner—alone attempted (with varying success) the full circle of poetic material. Since their day vernacular poetry has had its wings clipped, and though it has soared high the latitude of its flights has shrunk.

Defects have followed from this circumscription of area, this absorption in too narrow a world. The most notable is a certain provincialism of theme, which is always in danger of degenerating into a provincialism of thought. Scots poetry is apt to be self-absorbed, to become the scrupulous chronicle of small beer, to lack the long perspective and the "high translunary things" of greater art.



## HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS

“ Tiny pleasures occupy the place  
Of glories and of duties: as the feet  
Of fabled fairies, when the sun goes down,  
Trip o’er the grass where wrestlers strove by day.”

This in itself is no blemish, and, indeed, a confined outlook could scarcely have been avoided in the literature of a speech diverted from the larger uses of life and forced back upon one class and environment. But it means that it does not enter for the greater contests of the Muses, since a cameoist can never be a Pheidias, or a Teniers a Rembrandt.

From this inevitable provincialism spring two faults which are the prime weaknesses of Scots verse. One is a distressing facility, a preference for easy cadences and trite epithets and tedious jingles, a lack of the classic reticence and discipline. Burns is a supreme example to the contrary, and he remains a miracle in the Scots tradition. He has the sureness and the rightness of the antique, but much Scots verse is marred by a cheap glibness, an admiration for the third or fourth best, which is due to the lack of a strong artistic canon. It is a defect which is found in popular songs and popular hymns, the price which poetry must pay for popular handling. Scott said that a “vile sixpenny planet” looked in at the window when James Hogg was born, and that planet has not lost its baneful influence. The second defect is sentimentality, which is a preference for the inferior in feeling as the other is a preference for the inferior in form. A study of *Whistle Binkie* and the immense body of minor Scots verse in the last century shows us writers painfully at ease in Zion, who gloat over domestic sentiment till the charm has gone, who harp on

obvious pathos till the last trace of the pathetic vanishes, who make so crude a frontal attack upon the emotions that the emotions are left inviolate. Whether it be children, or lost love, or death, or any other of the high matters of poetry, there is the same gross pawing which rubs off the delicate bloom. Heaven is as frequent and as foolish a counter in such verse as in bad hymns, and there is a perpetual saccharine sweetness which quickly cloy. Instead of Burns's "stalk of carle hemp," there seems to be in such writers a stalk of coarse barley sugar.

The misfortune is that these faults are found not only in trumpery verse, but in work of real and often of high merit. Burns is free from them, but they are rampant in Hogg, Tannahill, Allan Cunningham, and most of their successors. They are the result of the provincialism into which the vernacular speech fell, and the consequent "inbreeding" of vernacular literature. But the same cause has produced qualities which may well be held to redress the balance. They are qualities, too, which belong to the whole literature from Henryson to our own day. Vernacular poetry is in a peculiar degree the reflex of the Scots character, and, like that character, combines within itself startling anomalies. It has on one side a hardy and joyous realism, a gusto for close detail, a shrewd observing intimacy with the natural world. Even in conventional work there will come pieces of sharp concrete experience which give it a rude life, and at the best there is a constant sense of the three dimensions of space, of men and women moving in a world riotously alive. The other side is within hearing of the



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horns of Elfland—a paradox from the point of view of art, but complementary when seen in relation to the national character, which is founded on these opposites. Romance is always at call, an airy, diaphanous romance, so that Scots poetry is like some cathedral of the Middle Ages, with peasants gossiping in the nave and the devout at prayer in side chapels, carved grotesques adjacent to stained-glass saints, and beams of heavenly light stealing through the brooding upper darkness. The Hogg of the *Shepherd's Calendar* can also claim with justice to be a “king of the mountain and the fairy school”; if a “vile sixpenny planet” presided at his birth, so did the dancing star under which Beatrice was born. The combination is found in every literature, but in Scots the transition from the commonplace to the fantastic and back again is especially easy, since each mood has its source deep in the history and character of the race. Romance in the North has always some salt of the pedestrian, and the most prosaic house of life has casements opening upon fairy seas.

## II

### MORRIS AND ROSSETTI

It is a solemn business to take stock of the idols which once adorned our boyish Hall of the Muses. Some which twenty-five years ago stood in the outer courts we would now move into the *pene-tralia*; some would suffer the reverse order of change; as to others, we wonder how they ever

got there at all. Yet, on the whole, in mine I find no very great displacement, and two poets, who even a quarter of a century ago seemed to "date" and who belonged professedly to a "movement" which has long ago spent its strength, seem to me, in re-reading them, to have lost little of their spell.

Few figures more attractive and more individual than William Morris are to be met with in literary history. He had a noble courage, untiring industry, zest for a thousand things in life, and a constant tenderness for weakness and suffering. But his humanity was not of the quickly communicable sort which is needed in the life of politics; and though he led a busy practical existence, its true stages are to be found in his mind. Swinburne once said of him acutely that he was always more really inspired by literature than by life. In essence he was first a dreamer and then a craftsman; he walked steadfastly all his days in the direction of his dreams, and his many crafts were only broken lights from the fire of idealism which he nourished within him. Letters were the chief of his crafts, and amid his many businesses he found time for the production of a great mass of verse and prose. At the age of twenty-four he published *The Defence of Guenevere*, the finest fruit of that looking back upon mediævalism which was then the Oxford fashion. In 1867 came *The Life and Death of Jason*, the story of the Golden Fleece; the invocation is addressed to Chaucer, and there is some attempt at the Chaucerian manner. *The Earthly Paradise* appeared in four volumes between 1868 and 1870—twenty-four tales, half from classical and half from romantic sources, told in a strange land in the



West where Northern adventurers find a forgotten colony of Greece. In 1873 he published *Love is Enough*, an elaborately constructed mystery play, and two years later a verse translation of the *Æneid*. Meantime he had found a new inspiration in the Icelandic sagas, and his *Sigurd the Volsung*, which appeared in 1876, re-told one of the greatest of the world's stories in splendid anapæsts. The saga influence was exemplified in the series of prose translations and prose tales which followed. The remainder of his poetic achievement is to be found in his translations of the *Odyssey* and of *Beowulf*, in his *Poems by the Way* (1891), and in the stirring songs which he wrote for his Socialist comrades.

Morris's poetry seems to me to fall into three classes. First in time, and first, too, in perfection of form, come the pieces in *The Defence of Guenevere*. That book inaugurated an epoch, as did the *Lyrical Ballads*. None of his contemporaries or immediate successors so pierced to the heart of the Middle Ages—not Rossetti, whose talent was Romanesque, nor Swinburne, who was more Byzantine Greek than Gothic. Out of the *fabliaux* and the *chansons* and Froissart he devised scenes and incidents which for the reader are like narrow windows opening on a charmed world. Alone among his books it has the true and undying magic. Sometimes, as in "The Blue Closet" and "The Wind" and "Two Red Roses across the Moon," the verse sways and sighs with ineffable longing; sometimes, as in "Sir Peter Harpdon's End" and the wonderful "Haystack in the Floods," there is a savage grimness and the ring of iron. There is no sentimentality, no

vapours of the boudoir or the study. The whole spirit of the Middle Ages is there—its shuddering bravado, its angry credulity, its mysterious loneliness, and, like the voice of linnets in a wind, its adorable April songs. Morris seems to have attained in his early youth to his highest point in poetic form, as he did in prose, for no prose cadences of his later years are equal to those of his undergraduate story *The Hollow Land*.

The second class embraces *Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*. Here the poet is not reconstructing the Middle Ages; he has, through some kink or fold of Time, become himself mediæval. These poems have all the mediæval languor and uniformity of pattern, nor do they always escape the mediæval prolixity. Gently, placidly, they unroll themselves at the speed of more leisured ages. One mediæval quality alone they lack, humour, for there is none of the Chaucerian jollity. "The mood," as Professor Elton has said, "is that of sad old men telling old stories to other sad old men." They are immensely long, as were the old romances; *The Earthly Paradise* is twice the length of *The Ring and the Book*. The language is a smooth-flowing crystal stream, there is no rhetoric, and in the rhythm, "too full for sound or foam," there is something most satisfying and restful. But while it never cloy, it may grow monotonous, for it has all the mediæval *ennui*. The manner is not suited equally well to all the tales, and "The Lovers of Gudrun" produces an effect different from the original in the *Laxdæla Saga*. The figures are scarcely human; they have not even the illusion of three dimensions which painting gives; they are flat, like the



details in a tapestry. Morris has been called Homeric; but no wind from the outer world blows on the puppets of these poems, and we rarely have even the semblance of life. It is a decoration, not an epic.

Up to the early 'seventies Morris's inspiration in landscape had been the shallow green vales of the upper Thames, where the Windrush and the Evenlode wind among meadows like the brooks in an illuminated missal. But now he fell in love with a wilder land, and his two visits to Iceland in 1871 and 1873, and his study of the Sagas (for which purpose he acquired the language) made him the interpreter of the great tragic poetry and the austere creed of the North. He was fascinated by the "old Norse nobility of soul," which could practise virtue for its own sake without hope of present or future reward, and which built up a cosmogony in which Good must be followed though Good were destined to fail. In his *Sigurd* he produced a poem which was his own version of this faith—its gallant fatalism, its ever present sense of doom, but the great heart defying it. It is his nearest approach to the epic mood. The languor and monotony of the Middle Ages are forgotten, there is a cold wind blowing from the snows, and the story moves with a fierce, ringing speed. With *Sigurd* he reached perfection in that simple diction which is fitted both for plain and splendid narrative, which can kindle at the high tragic moment and yet does not lose its aptness in homely scenes. The work must always remain a fine, a unique achievement, but there is something lacking, something which is present in the broken lays of the *Elder Edda*, and which we can

only call magic. *Sigurd* impresses, but does not haunt the mind, as some of *The Defence of Guenevere* haunts it.

Morris can be represented not unfairly by selections. His work, except the earliest, is so much of a piece that its quality can be shown by extracts, and those who like the pattern can have recourse to the complete poems. He stands by himself in the history of literature, for he has little recognizable ancestry. Few things influenced him in English after Chaucer, though he found much that he liked; nor was he the product of the Greek and Latin classics. One book, his first, profoundly affected his contemporaries, but for the rest he made a world of his own into which no successor has dared to stray. He is rarely quoted or quotable, for his unit was not the phrase or the line, but the picture; but he has left us a gallery of rare and delectable pictures—a land East of the Sun and West of the Moon, in which we can rest as in a pleasaunce of Spenser's. He did more than any other man, too, to bring the tonic Northern philosophy within reach of his countrymen. Above all, he has dignified the craft of letters by a character perhaps the most generous, simple, manly, and dutiful since Sir Walter Scott.

There are two functions, it has often been said, of poetry; one, the revelation of the ideal in common things, the other, the imaginative creation of things in themselves wholly ideal, and thereby an adding to the store of poetic material. The first is the way of the large careless masters, while the second demands a nice craftsmanship and a certain degree of virtuosity. It is significant that Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who among recent



poets is distinguished by the invention of new poetic genera, was as much painter as singer—was, indeed, apart from Blake, the only figure in our literature who attained to high success in both arts. He became an art student, but finding that the pen could sometimes say what he desired more readily than the pencil, he followed the two crafts simultaneously. The earliest draft of “The Blessed Damozel” was written when he was nineteen, and a number of other poems and sonnets were contributed to *The Germ* and *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*; but his first book did not appear till 1861, a set of versions of *The Early Italian Poets*, republished in 1874 under the title of *Dante and His Circle*. His wife died in 1862, and Rossetti placed most of his manuscripts in her coffin. These were exhumed in 1870, when his first volume of original verse appeared. It contained all his early poems, part of the sonnet sequence called “The House of Life,” and many fine pieces like “Love’s Nocturn” and “The Burden of Nineveh.” His second volume, containing further sonnets and most of the ballads, was issued in 1881, and the *Collected Works* were published by his brother in 1886, four years after his death.

Two things strike at once all who feel Rossetti’s power, whether in attraction or repulsion. No English poet of his standing, except Gray, has left so slender a body of verse, and hardly any of it is second-rate or superfluous. Again, it is curiously underivative. There are traces of Elizabethan and Jacobean influence in the rhythms; Dante has cast a spell over his mind, and he has loved Keats and admired the early Browning; but he speaks

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with his own voice, and that voice is new. This novelty appertains both to his matter and to his technique. He wrote of spiritual things in the most definite and concrete sensible imagery. "Like Dante, he knows no region of spirit which shall not be sensuous also, or material." He sees the truth of emotion and thought not in metaphors, but in sharply realized pictures. His style again, whether in ballad or sonnet or lyric, is elaborate, subtle, and strange. He aims at a simplicity which is attained at the expense of infinite art. One of his devices is a bareness which is sometimes Biblical, sometimes almost infantine, lines ending in lapsing monosyllables:

"The wonder was not yet quite gone  
From that still look of hers."

"To be  
As then we were—being as then  
At peace. Yea, verily——"

or a sudden uncouthness which creates a sudden grimness—

"Even till the early Sunday light,  
When Saturday night is market-night  
Everywhere, be it dry or wet,  
And market-night in the Haymarket."

In the main the simplicity is not simple. It is initiate, sophisticated, deeply pondered, the work of one who muses over his craft and rarely feels the strong self-forgetting impulse of the greatest poetry. But that craft repays careful study, for it has endless intricacies. He can use short words so as to produce an effect of rich elaboration, and he can so handle polysyllables that they seem



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homely. He is an adept at the slow spondaic line, which seems to make a hush in the rhythmical movement; and he carried to perfection a fashion which in lesser men has become monotonous—the long full-sounding word followed by a strong monosyllable, as in—

“The wind of Death’s imperishable wing;”

and

“Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.”

Rossetti, if he can scarcely be placed among the greater poets, had an influence more potent and pervasive than many of the great. He intoxicated his contemporaries, and the effect may be seen in Swinburne and others. There is a ridiculous side to it, which H. D. Traill caught in his deadly parody of “Sister Helen”; but there is also a rare and not easily defined beauty. He wrote ballads, but he was not a ballad-maker, lyrics, but he was not a singer; he is always the artificer, working with arabesques and inlays and strange jewels and rich intractable substances. “The dwelling-place,” says Walter Pater, “in which one finds oneself by chance or destiny, yet can partly fashion for oneself; never properly one’s own at all, if it be changed too lightly; in which every object has its associations—the dim mirrors, the portraits, the lamps, the books, the hair-tresses of the dead, and visionary magic crystals in the secret drawers, the names and words scratched on the windows, windows open upon prospects the saddest or the sweetest; the house one must quit, yet taking, perhaps, how much of its quietly active light and colour along with us!—

grown now to be a kind of raiment to one's body, as the body, according to Swedenborg, is but the raiment of the soul—under that image the whole of Rossetti's work might count as a *House of Life*.<sup>1</sup> It is an image of singular fitness. Rossetti's world is *within doors*. Nature, the outer winds, are only seen or felt through delicately arched, fantastic windows. It is rarely that we have a true landscape seen with observing eyes, such as he gives us in "Spring":

"The young rooks cheep 'mid the thick caw o' the old:  
And near unpeopled stream-sides, on the ground,  
By her spring-cry the moor-hen's nest is found,  
Where the drained flood-lands flaunt their marigold."

To enjoy Rossetti it is necessary to be clear as to what we demand from him. He works at the greater matters of poetry, but with a narrow purpose. If he does not attain to the last sublimities, he is always winnowed, select, clarified. He can take us, too, to the authentic abodes of magic, as in "The Portrait":

"Where you might think to find a din  
Of doubtful talk, and a live flame  
Wandering, and many a shape whose name  
Not itself knoweth, and old dew,  
And your own footsteps meeting you,  
And all things going as they came."

He lacks Morris's movement and spaciousness, but the land to which he guides us has perhaps brighter fruits in its fantastic orchards and a stranger palace at the heart of it.

<sup>1</sup> *Appreciations*, p. 214.



## III

ROBERT BURNS<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to extract topical morals from Robert Burns—easy, and on occasion, desirable; but I should like to-night to forget that side of his genius, and to speak to you of him only as a poet. All great minds are like mountain ranges and fling out spurs into many countries. In one aspect Burns is the poet of Scotland, who has summed up the long troubled history of our land, and has combined all the diverse loyalties and traditions of Scotsmen. On another side he is the poet of our common nature who has expounded, as it has not often been expounded, the greatness and the frailty of plain humanity. On still another side he is the reformer who flashed the lantern of his satire into many foul corners. He appeals to us as patriots, as democrats, as citizens, as fallible men. But it is none of these things, fine as they are, which make him immortal. Many have preached the same creed with equal earnestness, with the same sincerity, and their names are to-day forgotten. Why is it that as years pass the fame of Burns rises steadily higher and becomes steadily a more universal thing, so that not Scotland only, but the whole earth acknowledges his power? It is because he was first and foremost a great artist, and though creeds and philosophies perish a perfect art endures. I want to speak to you for a little about Burns as a poet.

<sup>1</sup> A speech to the Edinburgh Burns Club, January 25, 1924.

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It is the fashion to call Burns a classic, and he is a classic in the strictest and truest sense. What does the word mean? It does not mean only that his position is accepted by everybody, and that no one but a lunatic decries his genius. It means that he has the same qualities as the great Greek and Latin poets, the universality and the perfection which are beyond the reach of time, and which owe no allegiance to geographical boundaries. He is a classic, as Sappho and Theocritus and Catullus are classics. Literature has many modes and fashions. We have idealists and realists, and romantics and naturalists, and sometimes one mode is in vogue and sometimes another. The exponents of these schools may be great writers, but in most of their work there is what an American critic called "a turbid mixture of contemporaneousness"; they make temporary and local appeals, and these appeals go out of fashion. About Burns there is nothing transitory. At his best he attains to the last pitch of perfection, and his work remains a finished thing, as imperishable, as unaging, as the mountains or the sea.

One may well ask how a man struggling with poverty in a remote Ayrshire parish, self-educated, tortured by a temperament too eager for his circumstances, managed to attain this classic quality, which most people believe to be the product of elaborate culture and a nicely balanced soul. It is not for me to expound the ways of genius which blows like the wind whither it listeth; but there were three influences which I think helped to mould the mind of Burns.

One was that he fell heir to the treasures of old Scottish ballads and songs, which, just because



they were the songs of the common people, were free from false literary modes and had the large direct simplicity which is the foundation of the classic. Another was his close kinship with earth. His days were not spent in a library or in an office, but in wrestling with intractable Ayrshire mud, and meeting the buffets of wind and rain. If such a man sang at all his songs would not smell of the lamp. And in the third place the strongest of literary influences upon him were those of English writers of the eighteenth century like Pope and Addison, who, with all their faults, had something of the classic balance and grace. From whatever cause it sprung the fact is beyond question, and I want you to consider a few of the qualities which make Burns all but unique in our literature.

In the first place he has the classic directness of vision and simplicity. He has a great clearness, rightness, and sanity. In his best Scots verse there are no loose edges, no indefinite colours. He is wholly sincere, both in form and matter; there is no suspicion of false sentiment; there is never a word too much; he is the most nobly economical of all the poets. Take, for example, the description of a spate in the "Brigs of Ayr." Every phrase is the result of direct observation, and stings like the whip of an east wind.

If we want to realize Burns's greatness as an artist we must study closely his methods. Take that perfect lyric, "It was a' for our Rightfu' King." Burns composed this from a dozen old rhymes, and there is scarcely a phrase in his song which does not occur in one or other of the originals. But the originals were doggerel, because there was no shaping art in them. Burns unerr-

ingly picked out of the patchwork the right words and the right cadences, and blended them into an immortal cry of regret and longing.

I do not say that his inspiration did not sometimes fail him, for his strength was like the strength of Antæus and only endured while he kept touch with his mother, the earth. Sometimes a malign imp prompted him to wander into stilted English, and so we get in the middle of "Ae Fond Kiss," a song as noble and austere as a Greek chorus, the atrocious lines—

"I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,  
Nothing could resist my Nancy."

But when he confines himself to his own tongue his instinct is unerring. Many have tried to add verses to his work, and have invariably made a mess of it. You remember the song "O' a' the Airts the Wind can blaw"? All that Burns wrote was two flawless stanzas of eight lines each. But an Edinburgh music-seller was ill-inspired enough to add other stanzas in which the westland winds are implored to bring back to him the lassie "who's aye sae neat and clean." That is the kind of bathos of which Burns was eternally incapable.

The second classic quality is freedom. In that turbid Scotland of the late eighteenth century there were a hundred factions at strife in Kirk and State. There were Moderate and High Flyer, Tory and Reformer, Patriot and Jacobin; there were traditions of piety and traditions of something very much the opposite; even the historic loyalties were divided between Jacobite and Covenanter. Burns had the true classic impartiality. He took no side, or rather he took all



sides, for he could discern the core of beauty in the most warring opposites. Somehow or other—and Heaven knows how he did it—he had the power to penetrate to the truth, and the truth made him free. The tragedy of his career lay far more in this than in any disposition to drink or casual amours. His democracy was far greater than that of the professed democrat. He would have been happier, perhaps, if he had condescended to compromise and had arrayed himself among the comfortable battalions of society, but he would not have been the great poet he was. He was too liberal for any Liberal; he was too tory for any Tory; for his devotion was to a liberty on one side and to a loyalty on the other which are eternally beyond the reach of partisans. There is a sentence of the late Sir Walter Raleigh's which puts better than I can this cardinal truth about his life. "His magnanimous recklessness speeded him on his way to death, but it was the same quality of his mind which, in the beginning, had lifted him into the light and delivered him from slavery. He owed a death to the God of whom music and song and blood are pure; he paid his debt early, but he was no loser by the bargain."

The third classic quality in Burns which I would have you note is joy. For all the grimness of his life, for all the passion of sadness which breaks out in some of his greatest verse, the result is not sadness. It is joy, the joy of the conquering artist, the joy of the man who is determined to make the world realize the beauty and delight that can be found in life if it be manfully faced. Who is it to whom Burns speaks most nearly? Not the

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dismal and the disillusioned, not weeping sentimentalists, not the dull and worldly, not the bloodless and the shirker. It is to lovers, to soldiers, to true friends, to those who carry the singing heart in the journey of life. That is why Burns Clubs are in the right of it; that is why on the 25th of January men meet all over the world and celebrate the birthday of a poet whose course to the ordinary eye would seem to have been shadowed with clouds, and whose bark went down in wintry seas. We celebrate that birthday because the life on any true computation was triumphant, because Burns attained to the freedom of truth and the freedom of great art, and has bequeathed to the generations above all things a heritage of courage and joy.



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IX

THE NOVEL AND THE  
FAIRY TALE



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## THE NOVEL AND THE FAIRY TALE<sup>1</sup>

### I

I PROPOSE THIS AFTERNOON TO AMUSE MYSELF—and, I hope, to interest you—with something which rarely comes my way—an informal gossip about literature. It is now a good many years since I first became interested in books. But all my life I have also been interested, professionally interested, in other things, so that I have no title to speak on literature as a man of letters for whom the written word has been the working instrument of his career. The result of this imperfect absorption in the subject has been to make my views on many literary subjects highly unorthodox. I do not seem to have the right standard of values—at least I have not quite the same standard as the authoritative critics.

For example, I am of opinion that *Middlemarch* is one of the half-dozen greatest novels ever written, but I do not find many people to-day who have a good word for George Eliot. Again, I think that the best modern English prose has not been written by professed stylists, but by people like Huxley and Newman, whose one aim was to

<sup>1</sup> Presidential address delivered to the Scottish Branch of the English Association, November 22, 1930.



say clearly what they had to say and to have done with it—a creed which would be regarded, I fear, as a sort of blacklegging by most men of letters. Again, I think that, among English poets since Keats, probably a larger proportion of Matthew Arnold's work will endure than that of any other; but I fancy that there are not many who share that opinion.

But my chief heterodoxy—heterodox, I mean, as regards the professional critics, not as regards the ordinary reader, who, I suspect, often shares these views—my chief heterodoxy has to do with the English novel. It has always been my secret view that the English novelists of the eighteenth century were a little over-praised—even Defoe and Fielding. But I think that the nineteenth-century novel in England is one of the main achievements in our literature, comparable with the Elizabethan drama. I should rank without hesitation Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens among the greatest of the world's novelists, and I should class at least two novels of Thackeray, one of George Eliot's, and three of Thomas Hardy's, among the world's greatest works of fiction.

I apologize for these egotistical confessions, but they have brought us to our starting-point—the Victorian novel. It is hard to say what is the special gift of our people in literature. Sometimes I think it is for a kind of lyric; sometimes I think it lies in the writing of history; but on the whole I believe it is for fiction. The Victorian novel is the most typical product of our national genius. Now that, I fear, is an unfashionable opinion. The novel, we are told to-day, has progressed

far beyond such jejune methods. To-day it is weighted with a psychological profundity of which the Victorian innocents never dreamed. They, poor souls, believed that black was black and white was white; we now know that there are no clean colours, but that everything is a muddy yellow. They thought it their business to tell a story, but to tell a story is to shape existence into an arbitrary pattern for which there is no warrant. The true artistry of the novel, we are told, should be a thing of infinite delicacy and precision, which can catch and register the faintest whispers of the sub-conscious. It should take the whole complex of life for its province, neglecting nothing as common or unclean, and finding its unity not in any pattern super-imposed, but in what the subject matter itself presents, if viewed with complete detachment and sincerity.

Now, I am not going to argue against that doctrine, but I would suggest that for the sake of clearness we should get a new name for the work which it has inspired. These contemporary palimpsests of sensations and emotions and passions may have their scientific value, they have undoubtedly their literary value, but obviously they belong to an entirely different class from the books which we have been accustomed to call novels. There is no common denominator which enables us to compare *David Copperfield* with the fiction of certain modern French, English, American, and German writers. Let us confine the word novel, for our present purposes, to the kind of book which the great Victorians produced, and disregard the question as to whether it is inferior as a literary kind to that which is produced



by the new iconoclasts. It is enough for us that it is different. A novel, in the sense in which I use the word, is *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Our Mutual Friend* and *Vanity Fair* and *Midd'lemarch* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

## II

There is a passage in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* which I think puts very well the general purpose of this kind of novel. He is speaking of Wordsworth's poetry, and his words apply to any great work of art, and especially, it seems to me, to prose fiction as the Victorians conceived it. Its purpose, he says, is:

"To give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasury, but one for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes that see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."

From that sentence of Coleridge it would be easy to develop a whole philosophy of the art of fiction. Fiction deals with ordinary life; but, without ever losing touch with the ground, it must somehow lift it into the skies. It must give it for us an air of novelty and strangeness and wonder, by showing beauty in unlikely places, courage where one would not have looked for it, the jewel in the pig's snout, the flower on the dunghill. A poet like Milton or Dante brings cosmic sublimities within

hail of our common life; a great novelist makes our common life itself cosmic and sublime.

But we must go farther than the general purpose. If it is to be attained, certain rules must be observed. Take first the method by which life is to be presented. Certain modern critics of the Victorian novel complain of its lack of realism. It sentimentalizes life for us, they say, and fails to tell the whole truth about it. Life, we are told, should be allowed to speak for itself, and not be selected and winnowed by the arbitrary will of the novelist. The novelist should be merely the medium through which the real world speaks in all its crudeness and confusion. Well, I would remark that on that principle you will get an inventory, not a work of art. The business of art is to present life, the real point of life, and for that selection is necessary, since a great deal of life is off the point. It must clear away the surplusage of the irrelevant, the inessential, the inorganic. It must provide the only true kind of picture, which is an interpretation.

The real objection of these critics is, I think, that the Victorians were not ugly enough. They did not believe that the pathological was the most important thing in the world, and that the most characteristic thing about a house was the adjacent dunghill. They were too deeply interested in humanity to be obsessed by that side which humanity shares with the brute creation. They were too interested in the human soul to give all their time to its perversities and vagaries. They had a cleaner palate and a robuster philosophy than their critics, and if they are blamed on this score, then they must share the blame with all the



greatest literature of the world since Homer.

Again, they were not clever people, like those who decry them, and in this they were akin to the ordinary man, who is nearly as suspicious of mere cleverness as Mr. Baldwin. The trouble about cleverness is that it is so rarely greatness. The clever person is much more interested in himself than in anything else, and in whatever he does he is always looking at his own face in the mirror. It is a curious fact that since the War, which meant for all the world such a noble renunciation of self, most of our poetry and fiction should be so egocentric. The writers are perpetually wrestling with their own moods and tinkering with their own emotions, and they rarely rise to the self-forgetfulness of the greater art. The Victorian novelist was sublimely unconscious. He was absorbed with life and lived fiercely in his characters. He was not a showman exhibiting a set of puppets, boring his audience by telling it constantly what he felt about it all.

Now it is a futile business to compare incomparables, and the work of many of our recent novelists, who are in strong revolt against the great Victorian novels, is not comparable with them. It is based on a different theory of art, on a different conception of the novel. Brilliant and valuable as much of their work is, I do not think that they succeed in what I regard as the central and dominant type of fiction, of which the Victorians have given us the greatest examples in our own or in any language.

## III

But I want to invite you to-night to a different and, I think, more fruitful kind of inquiry; and all I ask of you is that you fling your mind back to the literature of your childhood. We have always had story-tellers and makers of fiction since the days of the cave-man. There is an eternal impulse in human nature to enliven the actual working life by the invention of tales of another kind of life, recognizable by its likeness to ordinary life, but so arranged that things happen more dramatically and pleasingly—which indeed is the familiar world in a glorified and idealized form.

That is the origin of what we call the folk tale or the fairy tale—we need not for our present purpose make any distinction between them. These tales come out of the most distant deeps of human experience and human fancy. They belong to the people themselves, not to a specially gifted or privileged class, and they are full of traces of their homely origin. They deal with simple and enduring things, birth and marriage and death, hunger and thirst, natural sorrows and natural joys. They sprang from a society where life was hard, when a man was never quite certain of his next meal, when he never knew when he rose in the morning whether he would be alive in the evening, when adventure was not the exception in life, but the rule. It was a dangerous world and a cruel world, and therefore those who dwelt in it endeavoured in their tales to escape from it. They pictured weakness winning against might,



gentleness and courtesy against brutality, brains as against mere animal strength, the one chance in a hundred succeeding. Such things do sometimes happen, and the society where the folk tales were born clung fiercely to this possibility, because on it depended their hope of a better time. Like Malvolio, they "thought nobly of the soul". The true hero in all the folk tales and fairy tales is not the younger son, or the younger daughter, or the stolen princess, or the ugly duckling, but the soul of man. It was a world where a great deal of discomfort and sorrow had to be borne, and where the most useful virtue was the passive virtue of fortitude; but in the folk tales it is not this passive virtue that is exalted, but daring, boldness, originality, brains—because the people who made them realized that the hope of humanity lay not in passivity but in action.

The appeal of such stories has not been lessened by time. In one form or other they have delighted youth for a thousand years and more. Poets and artists have borrowed from them and made elaborate artistic creations out of their simplicities. Their appeal is to every class and age; indeed they form a kind of *corpus* of popular philosophy. But the particular point I want to make is this: in a sophisticated society something more is wanted than the simple folk tale, and that something is the novel. My argument is that only in so far as the novel is a development of and akin to the folk and fairy tale does it fully succeed, and that it is in this kinship that the virtue of the great Victorian novels especially lies.

I observe about these novels that in the first place they tell a good story—something which

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grips and enthrals the reader, with true drama and wonder in it. In the second place they are full of characters recognizable as real types, and they pass judgments on these characters; that is, the story-teller regards some as definitely good and some as definitely bad. In the third place, their method of reproducing reality is not that of an inventory of details, but of a judicious selection. In the fourth place, the story-teller is primarily interested in the events he has to tell of, and not in what the jargon of to-day calls his "reactions" to them. He does not stop to obtrude his own moods. Lastly, he has a dominant purpose, a lesson, if you like, to teach, a creed to suggest, the nature of which we shall consider later.

Now all these things the great Victorians had. Most of these things their critics lack. All these things the folk tales possess. Let us look a little farther into them.

### IV

First for the story. I believe that there are only a very limited number of good plots in the world, though you have endless variations of them. That was more or less the idea of the Greek dramatists; it seems to have been more or less the idea of Shakespeare; and it is more or less the idea of the great novelists. It is curious, if you consider the classic novels, how limited is the number of motives. Moreover, I think you will find them all already in the folk tales. Let us make a short list of them.

There is first of all what we may call the picaresque motive, the story based on extension in



space, on the fact that the world is very wide, and that there are a great many odd things in it. A young man sets out to seek his fortune; an ill-treated child runs away from its stepmother; a pretty girl is driven into the forest. There are endless variations on the subject. The hero may be the pure adventurer in the void, waiting to see what turns up; or he may have a serious quest to find something or somebody that is lost, to unravel a mystery, to marry a lady the fame of whose beauty has reached him. And the thing may be done seriously or in a spirit of comedy. It may stick close to earth or adventure into the clouds. The road may be a pleasant, bustling highway running past windmills and gardens and farms and little towns, or a mysterious path through enchanted forests. The one thing common to them all is the conviction that the world is full of surprising things and that anything may happen to the adventurer.

Open Grimm, or Perrault, or any of the great folk tale collections, and you will find a multitude of examples in this class. "Little Brother and Little Sister," "Hop o' my Thumb," "The Little Tailor," "The Two Brothers," "Puss in Boots," "The Sleeping Beauty" are a few of the most familiar. In fiction we have *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas*; we have *Tom Jones* and *The Cloister and the Hearth*. When D'Artagnan rides to the sea he is doing what the people in folk tales did. So is Mr. Polly when he sets out on his travels, and so is Mr. Pickwick when he mounts the Rochester coach.

Next there is the motive which Aristotle said was one of the chief things in drama, and which

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he called *Peripeteia*, or Reversal of Fortune. It is the commonest subject of the folk tales. We can picture the peasant in the Middle Ages, groaning under the exactions of kings and nobles and churchmen and accustomed to see proud cavalcades drive him off the road into the ditch, consoling himself with tales which told how the mighty were brought low, and grace was given to the humble. And we can imagine the peasant's son, full of young ambitions which he sees no way to attain, being cheered by the tales of swineherds who became kings, and goose-girls who became princesses, and the plain fighting man who married the Sophy of Egypt's daughter. It is a very old motive and a very modern one. You will find it in the Bible, in the stories of Ruth and Saul and David, and of Nebuchadnezzar the King; you can find it in the latest trashy feuilleton, in which the beautiful kitchen-maid becomes a duchess. Very closely connected with it is another theme which Aristotle made the second staple of tragedy, and which he called *Anagnorisis* or Recognition. That is, so to speak, the proper climax of Reversal of Fortune, and you find it alike in the greatest and the crudest of tales. Its crude form is the child changed at nurse, the missing heir with the strawberry mark on his arm, and all the business which concludes with "You are my long lost brother!" The mere fact that you find it in the most elementary literature which possesses any popular appeal seems to suggest that it is rooted in something very deep in human nature. The reason is obvious. It is the most dramatic form of happy ending. One look is given, one word is spoken, and the prince who has been a swineherd is a



prince again, while the usurper is cast out upon the world.

The folk tales based on Reversal of Fortune are among the best. At the top I should put one which is not a folk tale at all, but the invention of a modern writer, Hans Andersen's "Ugly Duckling." It is modern, but it is in the true folk tradition. Among the old stories I would cite "The Hut in the Forest," "The Goose Girl," and "Cinderella." If you want parallels from the great Victorians I would suggest *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary* and *Ivanhoe* from the beginning of the era, and Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* from the close. Mr. Hardy is always very near the soil and the traditions of the soil, and the ascent of Donald Farfrae and the descent of Michael Henchard are in the true folk spirit.

The third theme is what I venture to call the Survival of the Unfittest, the victory against odds of the unlikeliest people. That is based upon the incurable optimism of human nature. The men who made the folk tales had no notion how it happened, so they were forced to bring in enchantments of all sorts to make it possible—fairy godmothers, benevolent old women, magic rings and swords and shoes and cloaks. But they had an unshakable conviction that it could happen and that it would happen, and they believed in happily fated people who had more luck than others, more courage, and more dexterity, who were somehow blessed by the gods, and were able to perform feats impossible for others. The popularity of certain film stars is a proof that human nature has not outgrown this belief.

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The theme takes various forms. There is courage against impossible odds, as in the stories of the conquests of dragons and giants. "Jack the Giant-Killer" and "Jack and the Beanstalk" are familiar examples. Dumas is full of the same story, as in the deeds of D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers, and the death of Bussy d'Amboise. Again, there is escape against all reasonable odds, as in "Blue Beard" and "Snow-drop" and "Rumpelstiltskin" and "Hansel and Gretel." Enchantments are unhappily denied to the modern novelist; he is not allowed to bring in fairies to help him out; but you will find the same situation when Dugald Dalgetty escapes from the dungeon at Inveraray, and young Waverley is delivered from the hands of the Gifted Gilfillan by the Highlanders, and in Jeanie Deans's journey to London to see the King. The scales must be weighted against the hero in the folk tale; he must be the youngest son with no patrimony, the poor boy with no friends. His task must be made as difficult as possible, for how otherwise can we get the full drama—how otherwise can ordinary folk be persuaded that life has colour in it and a wide horizon?

One of the commonest varieties of this type is the story of the uncouth lover who at first sight has nothing to recommend him. You get it in "Bear-Skin," you get it in "The Frog Prince," in "Snow White and Rose Red," and in "Beauty and the Beast." The handsome swashbuckling gallant is all very well, but the folk mind did not think too highly of him. It suspected the obviously heroic and preferred to look deeper for quality. In this respect the folk tale has been



followed in some of the greatest Victorian novels. What is the plot of *Vanity Fair*? It is the contest of two suitors for the hand of a very tiresome young woman—the dashing George Osborne and the cumbrous Dobbin, and the book is a record of the struggle of the homely worth of Dobbin against the glamour of his rival both in life and death, until at long last it is duly rewarded. In George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* it is Tom Redworth who wins the glittering lady, not Percy Dacier; and in Mr. Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* Shepherd Oak, after many ups and downs, eventually is the accepted lover of Bathsheba Everdene. Truly the folk tale has august descendants.

## V

So much for the plot and the theme of the story. The next thing to be noted about the great Victorian novelists is their handling of character. Now, in the folk tale there is never any mistake about the people. The characters are human beings, and represent humanity in its central region, and not in its remote suburbs. The old story-teller was not interested in freaks. He understood a great villain and a great hero, but above all things he understood ordinary men, and he makes them reveal their character in their deeds, and does not make any pother about describing it. "If you cannot get hold of my people," he seems to say to the reader, "by seeing the kind of thing they do, then you are past praying for." Now this seems to me to be the very essence of good fiction. I have read novels

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by able men and women in which the characters could not get started to do anything because of the meshes of analytic psychology with which their feet were clogged. Pages of tortuous analysis had to be waded through before the hero could kiss his wife or eat his breakfast. The trick of dissecting a character before a reader's eyes seems to me abominably bad craftsmanship. The business of the novelist is to make men and women reveal themselves in speech and action, to play the showman as little as possible, to present the finished product, and not to print the jottings of his laboratory.

Another point. The makers of the folk tales were not afraid to pass judgment upon their characters. A man was brave or he was not; he was kind or he was cruel; he was foolish or he was wise. There is a school of fiction to-day which objects to passing moral judgments on anything or anybody. It derives principally from a really great man, the Russian Dostoievski, and people have praised his divine humanity which finds surpassing virtues in the worst of rogues. Now, I have nothing to say against this impartiality, though I think it may as easily have its roots in moral apathy and intellectual slovenliness as in divine wisdom. Philosophically, it may have its justification, but I suggest that since fallible men must have their standards and stick to them, such detachment is rather for their Maker than for themselves. In any case it is no virtue in a novelist who can only get drama by strong contrasts. The moral molluscs of certain fiction of to-day, who spend their time, if I may borrow a phrase of the late D. H. Lawrence, in sinning their way to



sanctity, would have puzzled the makers of folk tales, as they puzzle any ordinary man. The great Victorian novelists have the same clearness of moral outline. They realize that all of us are a compost of good and bad, but that the orientation of certain men and women is as clearly towards evil as that of others is towards good, and they do not scruple to say so.

One last word on the question of character. The folk tale is not afraid of greatness. It believes that humanity is not a drab collection of mediocrities, but that nearly everybody has some poetry in him, and that it can flower at times into something which leaves the earth altogether and strikes the stars. Because it believed in human nature it believed that human nature could transcend itself and become god-like. Its heroes are so full of vitality that no giant or dragon or wicked step-mother manages to hamper them in the long run. They go their appointed course with a divine carelessness. They are immortal until they have fulfilled their purpose.

Such a creed springs from optimism about human nature, and I do not think that any great imaginative writer has been without it. The power of creating a figure which, while completely human, seems to soar beyond humanity, is the most certain proof of genius. In such cases the creator seems to be dominated by his creation. It takes charge of him and has an independent life of its own over which he has no control.

There are two characters which seem to me to have taken charge of Shakespeare—Cleopatra and Falstaff. Whenever Cleopatra appears she dominates the scene, and the author is only a curtain-

raiser in the wings. She and Antony both die, but speaking for myself, while I believe in Antony's death, I do not believe in Cleopatra's. As for Falstaff, it is a platitude to say that he got completely out of Shakespeare's control. The time came in the beginning of *Henry V*, when Shakespeare wished to dismiss him to make room for his reformed hero, and in order to wean the reader's affections from him it was necessary to degrade him. But Falstaff obstinately refuses to go, and all Shakespeare's art cannot degrade him. As Professor Bradley says, "Shakespeare created so extraordinary a being and fixed him so firmly on his intellectual throne that when he sought to dethrone him, he could not. A moment comes when we are to look at Falstaff in a serious light, and the comic hero is to figure as a baffled schemer, but we cannot make the required change either in our attitude or our sympathies. We wish Henry a glorious reign and much joy of his hypocritical politicians, lay and clerical; but our hearts go with Falstaff to the Fleet, or if necessary to Arthur's bosom, or wheresomever he is."

Let me offer you one or two other instances. There is Becky Sharp. Becky is too much for Thackeray. She is a little green-eyed, false, cold-hearted wretch, but vitality has nothing to do with morals. She keeps the stage to the end of the book and holds our sympathies even when she is deservedly punished; while Amelia Sedley, though her creator may sentimentalize as much as he pleases about her sweetness, remains a doll stuffed with sawdust.

Take Andrew Fairservice in *Rob Roy*. No sooner had Scott created him than he obviously



began to dislike him, and he depicts him in all kinds of meannesses and cruelties. But our interest in the worthless Andrew does not ebb. He has only to appear on the stage and he blankets everybody else, even Bailie Nicol Jarvie and Rob Roy himself. Or take Trollope's Mrs. Proudie. You remember that in the *Last Chronicle of Barset* she suddenly dies. A friend once told me that he remembered the publication of the novel. One man would go up to another in the club and say, "They tell me that Mrs. Proudie is dead. I don't believe a word of it."

So, also, with two at least of Dickens's characters, Mr. Pickwick and Sairey Gamp. Mr. Pickwick, as Mr. Chesterton has pointed out, is simply the fairy prince, unconquerable, immortal, stumbling into troubles only to soar above them. Happily Dickens never tried to kill Mr. Pickwick, for he would have found it impossible. We could have believed in most things which he chose to tell us, but never in Mr. Pickwick's death. But a greater instance is Sairey Gamp. Actually she is a dreadful being, drunken, fraudulent, avaricious; but she is clearly immortal. Her quarrel with Betsey Prig is the only scene in literature which ranks beside the scenes into which Shakespeare introduces Falstaff. Imagine how the ordinary conscientious realist of to-day would have managed Sairey. He would have made her squalid and revolting: he would have blinked no sordid detail of her life; he would have turned her poor old rag-bag of a mind inside out; and all the while she would have been as dead as Queen Anne. As it is, nothing can kill her. She goes her wheezy, alcoholic way, a certain immortal. We

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are not told what became of her, and we do not need to be told, for she is as assured of continuance as the Solar System.

### VI

I will pass lightly over the other two characteristics of the great Victorian novels which I have cited, and in each of which they show their kinship with the folk tale. Both represent a world in which the selective power of art has been at work. The Victorian novel is often prolix but it is never confused. The main lines of development are always crystal clear. Scott, for example, is fond of pouring the contents of an antiquarian's memory into his pages, but when things begin to happen there is no prolixity. He selects infallibly the details which print a great scene eternally on the memory. So, too, with the folk tales. They never fumble. The right details are unerringly selected. A proof is their enduring power over the child's mind. Young people are gluttons for details and have an acute sense of what is fit and proper in that respect. They know that Robinson Crusoe found just the right number and kind of things at the wreck to satisfy the imagination, while they remember that that fearsome household, the Swiss Family Robinson, found so much that every scrap of interest goes out of the tale. And for generations youth has accepted the folk tale as never blundering in this vital matter.

Again, both the folk tale and the Victorian novel have the merit of them being unselfconscious. The great Victorians did not lay bare their souls, apart



from the souls of their characters. They were not concerned to preach a new metaphysic or a new morality. What they had to give in that respect must be implied. Their view of the universe is to be deduced from the drama unfolded; it is never given in set terms. Thackeray, indeed, has sometimes the air of a coy and sentimental showman, as in the last paragraphs of *Vanity Fair*; but this is a mere trick of his. His real views on the problems of life must be looked for in the fortunes of Becky Sharp and Dobbin and Pendennis and Colonel Newcome, and not in any irrelevant interpolations. The Victorian novelist at his best was as objective as Shakespeare, and as the anonymous folk tale.

## VII

I come lastly to the greatest of the links between the two—the fact that they have a dominant purpose and the same purpose. The Victorian novels and the folk tales are not mere transcripts of life—they are interpretations of life, and they are interpretations of life in a hopeful spirit. In the folk tale the plain man comforted himself in his difficulties by showing that the weak things of the earth can confound the strong; that nothing is impossible to the courageous and single-hearted; that the unfittest in the worldly sense can survive if he is the fittest in more important respects. They are a glorification of the soul of man, an epic of the resurgence of the divine in human nature. They make the world a happier place because

they show it interpenetrated by hope and opportunity.

The great novelists do the same thing by subtler methods. With them it is not the good fairy that solves the problem, but something unconquerable in the human spirit. They make the world more solemn, for they show the darkest places in it. They show the capacities for evil in man's breast, the cruelty and callousness of life, the undeserved suffering of the good, and the undeserved fortune of the evil; they show the transience of human glory and the fragility of human hopes. But if they make life more solemn they also make it brighter. They revive hope in humanity by revealing its forgotten graces and depths. They are optimists in the largest sense, for without optimism there can be no vitality. Thackeray, indeed, indulges often in a kind of gentle melancholy, but it is not to be taken too seriously. His gusto, his delight in his personages, gives the lie to his occasional pessimistic meditations, which indeed are only bits of self-humiliation designed to propitiate the gods.

The optimism of such novels and of the folk tale is a profound thing, for it is based upon a very clear and candid view of life. The folk tale knows only too well the stubborn brutality of things; and, knowing this, it is still prepared to hope. Such optimism is far more merciless than any pessimism. Also it is far closer to reality. A tale which describes any aspect of life and makes of it nothing but a pathological study in meanness and vice is more fantastic than any fairy tale. You remember Stevenson's fable of the *Lantern-Bearers*, where he pictures a camp of small



urchins who carry their smelly tin lanterns buttoned under their overcoats, and reflects what asses such a group, sheltering in the cold sand on a bleak sea-shore on a dark autumn night, must have seemed to the spectator who could not understand their recondite pleasures. And from the picture he draws a profound moral.

“To miss the joy,” he says, “is to miss all. . . . Hence the haunting and truly spectral unreality of realistic books. Hence, when we read the English realists, the incredulous wonder with which we observe the hero’s constancy under the submerging tide of dullness, and how he bears up with his jibbing sweetheart, and endures the chatter of idiot girls, and stands by his whole unfeatured wilderness of an existence, instead of seeking relief in drink or foreign travel. Hence in the French, in that meat-market of middle-aged sensuality, the disgusted surprise with which we see the hero drift sidelong, and practically quite untempted, into every description of misconduct and dishonour. In each, we miss the personal poetry, the enchanted atmosphere, that rainbow of fancy that clothes what is naked and seems to ennoble what is base; in each, life falls dead like dough, instead of soaring away like a balloon into the colours of the sunset; each is true, each inconceivable; for no man lives in the external truth, among salts and acids, but in the warm, phantasmagoric chamber of his brain, with the painted windows and the storied walls.”

You have the same moral in a verse of Francis Thompson’s:

“The Angels keep their ancient places—  
 Turn but a stone, you start a wing!  
 ’Tis ye, ’tis your estranged faces,  
 That miss the many splendoured thing.”

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and in some delightful doggerel lines of Mr. Masefield:

“ I have seen flowers come in stony places,  
And kindness done by men with ugly faces,  
And the Gold Cup won by the worst horse at the races,  
So I trust, too.”

### VIII

The folk tale belongs to no one country or age. Many go back to the ancientry of our race. They are part of the common stock of humanity and are closer to mankind than any written word. They are the delight of our childhood and they are part of our unconscious thought. I have a notion that things so long descended and prepotent are not likely to be forgotten. I have a notion, too, that any form of literature related to them, inspired by the same creed, close to the earth and yet kin to the upper air, will have the same immortality. To-day we are sometimes told that Scott and Thackeray and Dickens, and even Thomas Hardy, are back numbers, that they practised a superseded form of art, that the novel of the future will be a far more recondite thing, tremulous with meaning, profoundly “aware,” surcharged with subtle psychology, and that the old crude business of story and character and moral preference and a cheerful philosophy is only for the amusement of children. I take leave to doubt that forecast. The other day I took up a book of essays on the “Eighteen-seventies,” and I found these



## HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS

words by one of the truest of our living poets—Mr. Walter de la Mare :

“ The distant rumour that thrills the air is not only the sound of Time’s dark waters, but is mingled with the roar of our own busy printing presses. ‘ As we are, so you shall be ! ’ The very years that we now so actively occupy will soon be packed up in an old satchel, and labelled ‘ The Twenties ’ ; and our little hot, cold, violent, affected, brand-new, exquisite, fresh little habits of mind, manners, hobbies, fashions, ideals, will have thinned and vanished away, will steadily have evaporated, leaving only a frigid deposit of history ; a few decaying buildings, a few pictures, some music, some machine-made voices, an immense quantity of print—most of it never to be disturbed again. In the midst of the battle maybe it is indiscreet to muse on the tranquil, moonlit indifference of the night that will follow.”

It is a salutary thing to remind oneself that the judgments of posterity may be different from our own. But it is permissible, I think, to claim endurance for things which have the qualities that hitherto have endured—things that are close to the tap-root of humanity. I believe that so long as youth ascends the beanstalk with Jack, and rides in the glass coach with Cinderella, and sets off with the youngest son to seek his fortunes—that so long all ages will continue to dance with Becky at the Waterloo Ball, and take the heather with Rob Roy, and mount the Rochester diligence with Mr. Pickwick.

X

THOUGHTS ON A DISTANT  
PROSPECT OF OXFORD



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## THOUGHTS ON A DISTANT PROSPECT OF OXFORD<sup>1</sup>

### I

EAST OF MAGDALEN BRIDGE, BETWEEN CHERWELL and Isis, a ridge of upland runs for ten miles to the north-east, and culminates in the bold eminence of Brill, which dominates the flats of Buckinghamshire as the Hill of Cassel commands the levels of Flanders. From the crown of this ridge, above the village of Old Marston, may be had the only view of Oxford which is the same as that of our grandfathers. There is no sign of the hideous periphery of raw brick; the grey stone spires and turrets rise over woods and meadows within their cincture of mild hills just as they appeared to Dr. Johnson when he came this way of an afternoon. To a dweller on this ridge, the city is seen not as an unrelated vision at the end of a railway journey, but in the natural setting which first gave it significance. East and west is the waterway of the Thames; from the south over the Berkshire downs come the roads leading from Winchester and the Channel; down the Cherwell valley is the approach from the north, and over the distant Cotswolds the roads from Wales and the west; while across this very ridge runs the highway

<sup>1</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, October 1923.



from the Capital. The avenues of history are there before the eye, and it would be strange if such a dweller, having nothing of Oxford in sight but what is ancient and beautiful, did not amuse himself with pictures of her past.

Two books have lately been published which are potent aids to such reflections. Mr. Albert Mansbridge, in his *Older Universities of England*, has enlarged the Lowell Lectures which he delivered last year in America. He has come to the consideration of his subject at a later age than most of us, and therefore his eye is clearer and his judgment more mature. He approaches Oxford after a study of England and the English people, and no man has a better understanding of the English tradition than the founder of the Worker's Educational Association. He has the sense of history in every fibre, and rejoices in all things long-descended and continuous. Because it has been his business to deal with hard facts he judges shrewdly, because he has the historic imagination he judges tenderly, and because he is something of the prophet and dreamer he judges truly. He sees the older universities as embodying a high purpose which is still in process of fulfilment; their ancient organism is still young; and whatever the future holds for them in the way of development is to be found in embryo in their past. Above all he sees them not as fortuitous growths, but as rooted in the life of England, a mirror in each age for the vices and virtues of the land, as toughly and intimately national as the village church and the borough hall. He has given us a picture of their development which is at once a vivid piece of historical painting and an acute

study of English society. Mr. Falconer Madan's little volume, *Oxford Outside the Guide-Books*, contains the notes of a very learned and witty scholar on the delicacies of Oxford history—the key-points for historical reconstruction, the quainter survivals, the *nuances* of old social life, jocosities which have not lost their flavour. *Lætus, hilaris, jucundus*, he re-creates the past for the benefit of the present. Both Mr. Mansbridge and Mr. Madan give us a "prospect" of Oxford, a panorama of her stages, though the latter also takes us by the hand and invites us in his agreeable company to poke into dusty nooks.

## II

The dweller on the ridge of which I have spoken, if he indulge in picture-making, will not concern himself with prehistoric Oxford, when the hills were a tangle of exotic forest, and the valleys vast quagmires, and the elephant from Shotover, who descended to drink at the Cherwell, met his death from an early and aggressive type of Don, the machairodon or sabre-toothed tiger. The shameless pun is Mr. Madan's, but the bones of the luckless elephant were dug up the other day in Magdalen deer-park. But if he takes some date, say, in the fourth century of our era, for his prospect, he will look over a strange landscape. The Cherwell will be some hundreds of yards broad, and the Isis, half a mile wide or more, will be seen sweeping in a broad silver band from the corner of Wytham hill. Most of the two vales will be swamp and lagoon, but at the junction of the



streams will be a mass of trees running northward, where is the spit of gravel which is now the site of Oxford. On that spit there is no sign of life, except perhaps the smoke of a hunter, who has landed from his coracle to cook the wild-fowl he has taken among the floating driftwood and matted isles of the Isis. But on the ridge behind there are habitations. Clearings have been made in the Stowood forest, and on the promontory at Beckley there is a Roman villa, where the road from Dorchester to Bicester is carried on a causeway across Otmoor. This, however, is a mere side-path, and the great Roman highways, Ake-man Street and Ermine Street, are many miles distant. The Romans knew too much about malaria to go near a swamp, and preferred for their dwellings the dry uplands of Cotswold.

A century later the Romans have marched away, and the briars have grown over Beckley villa and their woodland altars. Presently we have the Saxon invaders on the ridge, giving names to the clearings, like the "field of Ella" and the "stone town." If we take up the same viewpoint in the eighth century we shall see a change in the triangle of hard ground below at the junction of Cherwell and Isis. In the course of the centuries a ford has been discovered where now stands Folly Bridge—a double ford, for the road leads first across the main stream of Isis, and then, turning sharply southward, across a second channel at the foot of Boar's Hill. Men have begun to make their homes on the patch of gravel above the clay, for it is comparatively dry and healthy, defended by the marshes on east and west, and affording outlets to the south and north.

## ON A DISTANT PROSPECT OF OXFORD

A street of rude huts lines what is now St. Aldate's, and to the east of it rises a cluster of thatched roofs which is the new nunnery of St. Frideswide, the lady whose doings are depicted in a window of the Latin Chapel in Christ Church Cathedral. The place is called Oxenaforda, and is already a large hamlet, fast growing into a town, for it is the key to the Upper Thames, and therefore of importance to both Mercia and Wessex.

Presently there is a city, duly walled and be-castled, with its four streets of wooden houses intersecting crosswise at the place called Quatuor Furcas or Carfax, and the churches of St. Michael at the north and south gates and the churches of St. Peter to bless the eastern and western approaches. She suffers heavily at the Norman Conquest, so that at the time of the Domesday survey she has a population of only 1,000 to her 732 houses; but she soon recovers, and begins to play her part in the history of England. On a snowy night in the year 1142 the Empress Maud escapes in white from the castle over the frozen river; in the palace of Beaumont outside the North Gate King Richard Cœur de Lion and King John first see the light, and royalty frequents the neighbouring palace of Woodstock. She is a busy little city, with her many trade guilds, and—sure proof of commercial prosperity—a flourishing Jewry which has the audacity to mock at the processions in honour of St. Frideswide, and even to smash up crucifixes. The Court has a weakness for the place, and grants liberal charters, and the Mayor has the right to act as Assistant Butler at Coronations. Meantime on the ridge on which our observer is stationed much has been happen-



ing. It is nearly all Crown land on which the hamlets have rights of feeding their herds of pigs—a chain of huge forests, Shotover, Stowood, Bernwood, with enclaves in them which are the holdings of various Norman houses. There is also church land there, and cells and chapels rise among the oak-woods, while at Beckley is a hunting lodge of the King's, and a great deer-park covering all the northern slopes of the hills and running down into the broad green swamp of Otmoor.

Some time in the twelfth century our observer, if he be a prescient man, will have scented a change. The roads are beginning to be thronged by a new type of traveller as part of the immense vagabondage of mediæval England. Turbulent disputatious lads are drifting towards the city from all quarters, begging their way, sleeping hard and faring rough, and talking of matters beyond the ken of the foresters and charcoal-burners on the ridge. The Oxford merchant, perambulating the High, begins to see at a street corner or in a church porch groups of hungry and ragged youths listening to an elder man who is speaking to them in strange tongues. The squire of Stanton or Marston finds that he cannot get his corn to the mill because of the mob of truculent boys who crowd the gates. It is the first rude beginnings of the University. The Englishman, unable to journey to Paris or Bologna, is making for himself schools at home, and as early as 1117 one Theobald of Étampes boldly dubs himself a *Magister Oxenefordiæ*. Soon these scholars have made themselves a guild, and hired rooms for lectures, and provided little hostels for their rude

## ON A DISTANT PROSPECT OF OXFORD

lodging, with signs over the door like an eagle or a brazen nose. The teachers, too, become a *societas*, and in another century colleges have been founded, and the University with its constitution and faculties is in being, with its headquarters in the little building which we call the old Congregation House, under the north-east corner of St. Mary's Church. The city grows enormously populous, rather to her disgust, for she does not welcome this herd of noisy, unprofitable students, who are perpetually quarrelling and hiving off to new homes. The respectable burgess prefers the old ways of solid merchandizing and an occasional visit from the Court. But the University has more powerful friends than the city, and at the great trial of strength in 1354, following the Town and Gown riot on St. Scholastica's Day, it is the University that wins, and the Corporation of Oxford is compelled to swear an annual oath to respect the University's privileges.

The mediæval student must have been a strange figure to the country folk on the ridge, and not less to their masters, the lords of the little manors. The foresters knew him as a ubiquitous poacher and breaker of pales; the dwellers by the roadside as a resourceful mountebank and mummer, when he caroused in the pot-houses with Henry Pimpernel and old John Naps of Greece. In term and vacation alike he had a rough life of it. He shared an attic with several others, sleeping under a ragged coverlet, with the winds of heaven blowing through a glassless window. His food was execrable, and his academic gown was literally his chief garment. He was up before dawn, reading by the first light in the libraries, and his study



of a night was done by the aid of a candle-end. Pestilence was always in the air, in the food he ate, and the water he drank, so that he was liable at any time to be cut off in his hardships. He was no pale retiring bookworm, but a robustious and aggressive person, who wore arms and rejoiced in a row. If we look at the old Benedictine buildings at Worcester College, or stand in a winter's morning in Merton Library, we can reconstruct the surroundings amid which his life was lived. We must picture, too, the narrow High Street with a gutter in the centre, the little halls that crowded its south side, the noisy Northgate Street, where corn was vended, the Beaumont Fields where archery or football or pike-staff play went on of an afternoon. When he walked out he was obliged to have a companion for defence in case of trouble with the townsmen—a custom which at Brasenose survived far into the nineteenth century, for it was rigid etiquette that undergraduates should walk out of college in pairs and arm-in-arm. His mind may have been well nourished, but his belly was often empty, for he would break his fast on a crust begged from the buttery, and his dinner at 10 a.m. might be no more than a thin broth. Oxford in those days might be but a barren fount of culture, but she was an assiduous nurse of character, and her gates were open to all, gentle and simple, rich and poor, who were willing to submit to her stony regimen.

By the sixteenth century the view from the hill-top has changed; to keep the spire of St. Mary's company there are the towers of Magdalen and New College. The young Elizabeth is hurried by way of Beckley to her captivity at Woodstock,

and long after returns a Queen, to be welcomed on Shotover by the city magistrates. Lord Williams of Thame has made very free with church lands, and the priory of Studley is a thing of the past. But the great forests still remain, though empty now of wolves and bears, and the game-warden in one of them is a certain Milton, whose grandson is destined to be a famous poet. Down in the Oxford streets there have been many changes: new colleges have been built, including Wolsey's noble fabric of Christ Church; and the University is so far above the city that already when men speak of Oxford they think only of the seat of learning. The new humanism has made ground, though far more slowly than at Cambridge, and soon the religious quarrel has been decided against the ancient Church. There is a difference, too, in the undergraduates, for slips of nobility and gentry have begun to matriculate there, instead of going as pages and squires to great houses. The raffish young gentleman appears, soon to be putting his manhood to trial in the Spanish Main, and there is a set who cultivate the unacademic Muses, and presently migrate to town to add to the number of the "University wits" and lead a merry and short life of plays, madrigals, and drinking bouts. Over this epoch hangs the bright influence of Gloriana, for it was the code of Elizabeth that gave the colleges their major share in University government—reforms carried out by Leicester in the intervals of less reputable business; and the great Queen loved to attend a disputation in St. Mary's till the hour of candle-lighting. Her famous words have often echoed in other hearts: "Farewell, farewell, dear



Oxford! God bless thee and increase thy sons in number, holiness, and virtue."

It would be hard to say that the seventeenth century saw an increase in virtue, but it was the most stirring period in Oxford's history, since she was swept into the main march of the nation's destiny. The beginning was peaceful enough for a dweller on our ridge, who was not greatly concerned with theories of Church and State. When he descended to market he would hear tales of the wonderful Doctor Laud, the head of St. John's, who was giving the University the statutes which endured for two hundred years; but our countryman left politics alone till they sought him out and upset his easy days. The outbreak of war brought the King to Oxford, and there were parliaments in her halls, and presently a Court resident in the colleges. Since the Cotswolds represented the Royalists' first line and the Chilterns that of the Parliament, our ridge, filling an intermediate position, became a battle-ground. In October 1642 Charles entered the city in triumph after Edgehill, and thereafter every month brought forth its sounding incident. Boarstall Castle under the Brill upland was besieged, and presently Oxford was an armed camp, and soon a beleaguered city, with the trenches at the back of Wadham, and across St. Giles's, and east of Magdalen Bridge. Our countryman was in the way of seeing brave sights—a grave young man, who was the Marquis of Montrose, riding north one March morning to conquer Scotland alone; Rupert and his horse swinging over Magdalen Bridge bound for a raid in the Chilterns; the Parliament army on Bullingdon Green; the June day when Essex marched by

way of Stowood to Islip and Woodstock, and the evening of the same day when Charles slipped between him and Waller and galloped for Burford and the West. A month later came news of Marston Moor, and then the plague, and after that a great fire, and melancholy fell upon the city round which the clouds were gathering. Next year she was closely beset, with Cromwell at Wytham and Fairfax at Marston; and the year after, when the Royalist army was scattered, Fairfax and Rupert met at Unton Croke's manor-house of Marston, just under our ridge, and negotiated terms of surrender. The dwellers on the hills saw the Prince march out with flying colours, and thanked Heaven that they would be vexed no more with the din of cannonades and visits from light-fingered soldiery. As they resumed their journeys to the town on market-days they may have seen the seventy evicted members of Christ Church foundation trooping sadly from the college, and the stout-hearted wife of the Dean, who refused to move, deposited in a chair in the middle of the quadrangle.

The rest of the century was peace, save for the quarrels of James with the Magdalen fellows, and it was notable for the activities of the unpopular Doctor Fell, who got Wren to build Tom Tower, from which the great bell of Oseney rang every night for distant countryfolk to set their clocks by. The Laudian discipline had gone to pieces during the Civil War, which for Oxford was one prolonged Eights Week. Tutors were courtiers and boon companions; undergraduates spent their days in faction fights, or, like the famous Lord Shaftesbury, in rowdy coursing matches. Up on



our ridge the age saw the passing of the great forests. In the unquiet times of war there were few verderers and wardens left, so the deer were hunted by all and sundry, and trees felled by passing troops and by the adjacent villages. Before the end of the century the hills were largely cleared, out of Shotover and Stowood were carved farms of rough pasture, and the woodlands were now to be measured by acres instead of miles. From the Cherwell banks a man looked up no longer at ridges dark with oak and ash and thorn. The wilds of Old England had begun to shrink.

The dawn of the Augustan age found Oxford still suffering from the indiscipline of the Stuart period, an indiscipline which affected both dons and undergraduates. It is easy to paint too dark a picture of eighteenth-century Oxford, but the fact remains that for the first fifty years there was a curious deadness and earthiness in the place. Oxford had forsworn herself; she had accepted the Hanoverian régime against her conscience for the sake of the loaves and fishes, for it is to be noted that, while Whig Cambridge produced forty-two non-juring Fellows, Tory Oxford could only show fourteen. The place shrank in numbers, for it was becoming a rich man's resort, where young gentlemen lived as if in a hunting-box, and the small yeoman class were getting scarcer. The poor man was now the exception instead of the rule. It was an indecorous age. The Fellows of Balliol resorted habitually to a low tavern over against the college to drink with draymen and tinkers, "and by perpetual bubbling add art to their natural stupidity to make themselves sots."

The Vice-Chancellor in the interests of order was compelled to "walk" himself, and found the Proctors in a disreputable ale-house. Merton Walks and Magdalen Grove and Paradise Garden were the dubious haunts of youth of an afternoon, and there were taverns and coffee-houses for the evening which no authority put out of bounds. It was a snobbish era, when noblemen and gentlemen-commoners strutted in fancy robes, and a man's clothes cried out his rank. The Oxford "smart" has been drawn for us by Nicholas Amherst—a being who spent what time he could spare from the adornment of his person on the neglect of his duties, who damned his father as "an old country putt," drank all day in the taverns, and contended for the favour of some "toast," probably the daughter of a local tradesman. To be sure there was another side. Charles James Fox at Hertford read hard at mathematics, and devoured Dante and Ariosto in the intervals of gaming and flirting, Blackstone at All Souls was clarifying the law of England, while Dr. Johnson found Pembroke a nest of singing birds. There were the Wesleys, too, and the "Holy Club," and there were dozens of quiet people who worked hard and lived respectably. But the atmosphere was bad; the serious student, like Mr. Gibbon of Magdalen, found "his time lost and his expenses multiplied," and the authorities made a dead set against the Methodists, with the quaint approval of Dr. Johnson. "I believe that they might be good beings, but they are not fit to be in the University of Oxford. A cow is a very good animal in a field, but we turn her out of a garden."

One curse of eighteenth-century Oxford was her



sham politics—a sentimental Jacobitism, which even at the end of the century Dr. Routh found flourishing in Magdalen, a thing begotten of bumpers of port and misapplied Scripture texts. Oxford had no right to the sentiment, for her service to the forlorn cause was only of the lips. For one moment the Government took it seriously, and sent a troop of horse to keep order, but presently its hollowness was understood, and the University was left in peace to drink the health of Prince Charles Edward. It was a very easy loyalty which came in with the wine and fled at the first sight of arms, and was rightly despised by the poor gentlemen of the North who were facing the fire of King George's soldiery. But it led to endless disorders. The Tories were for the most part the democracy of the colleges, but there were plenty of Whigs, mostly scions of the ruling families; so Fellows wrangled in their common-rooms, and party bands of mohawks paraded the streets and celebrated Jacobite festivals. Merton and All Souls were the Whig strongholds, and Hearne talks of "abominable riots at All Souls," where a Whig club dined on woodcock, "whose Heads they cut off in contempt of the memory of the B. Martyr." Not till the third George came to the throne did this folly cease.

Up on our hill the prospect has changed. The line of grey roofs from Magdalen to New College is now enriched with the pinnacles of All Souls and the fine dome of the Radcliffe Camera. The road from the city is appreciably better, though still far from good, and the citizens wander farther afield. Up the hill of a summer afternoon comes Dr. Johnson, on a visit from Town, to drink tea

at Elsfeld with his friend Mr. Francis Wise of Trinity, and get very much out of breath on the walk home. There are field-naturalists and antiquaries among the College Fellows, who see the hoopoe on Otmoor, and verify the botanical discoveries of Mr. Gerard of the Herball in Stowood, and write monographs on village churches and "British" remains. A little earlier Mr. Thomas Hearne might have been met with, the testy Jacobite sub-librarian of Bodley's, who would set out from St. Edmund Hall of a morning and walk thirty miles with a volume of Cicero in his pocket. Mr. Hearne was the eighteenth-century counterpart of the late Provost of Oriel, for he once covered—or so he says—the eight miles between Dorchester and Oxford in an hour and a quarter. Also the undergraduate is beginning to discover the neighbouring countryside. In Jacobean times, when he was not engaged in more doubtful recreations, he would spend his summer days in "tumbling in the Hay, watching frogs swimming, telling stories under a Hay-mow." But now he is beginning to forsake the idyllic for the athletic. He goes down to the river in cap and gown, changes, and rows to Nuneham. He fishes, like Mr. Jeremy Bentham. He is permitted to shoot over their lands by neighbouring squires, and, if he is not, he poaches. He rides races on Port Meadow, and he hunts assiduously in the slow fashion of his century. If he can cover the distance he may don the blue and ermine of the Beaufort Hunt, or he may go north to Warwickshire and Mr. John Warde. The Bicester, which he calls the "Burcester," is a godsend to him when that famous pack is started, and many a



winter afternoon the dweller on our ridge must have watched an undergraduate party jogging homewards from a run with Lord Abingdon's Rycote Hounds.

We are now getting very near our own day, for the view from our hill has not altered for two hundred years, and the only change in the hill itself is that the old rough pasture has given place to better farming. Men coming up at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the London road found no houses till they reached the Cape of Good Hope Inn and saw Magdalen Tower rise like a dream beyond the Cherwell. But the railway, though the University fought hard against it, came in time, and with it the new *rentier* population which has spilled itself into red-brick suburbs to the north and east. Boar's Hill, twenty years ago as rustic as Wytham, is now, like the peak where Browning's Grammarian was interred, citied to the top and crowded with culture. As for the changes in the academic life, they may be followed in Mr. Mansbridge's pages. The open fellowships at Oriel, and the foundation of an Honours school, were the beginning of an intellectual revival, which is part of the history of England. The University administration was revised by Royal Commissions, and the old régime of study has been broadened to cracking point. The discomforts of the Middle Ages have been gradually expelled, till they only survive nowadays at the railway stations. "Only one error," Mr. Mansbridge says truly, "can destroy the life of scholarship, and that is committed by men who not only fear to embark on unknown seas, but who hold back because of the comforts

and rests of the shore." There was little of such holding back in nineteenth-century Oxford, and some old ghost from the past, if he returned to life, might well rub his spectral eyes and declare that of all that he knew and loved, whether in buildings or customs or ideals, nothing remained.

## III

Yet the ghostly judgment would be hasty, for the marvel of Oxford is not that so much has changed but that so much is changeless. Just as the prospect from our little hill has not altered in substance for centuries, so has Oxford, seen in perspective, remained the same in essence since her dim beginnings. Bracken still springs up, if permitted, in the quadrangle of All Souls, a survival from the wooded ridge of gravel which was before the city, and the thing may be taken as a parable: spray still washes her foundations from immemorial seas. It is not only that the past tends to jostle the present, and the hoar-ancient to make fantastic inroads on the modern. The Chancellor's Court has still the odd civil jurisdiction given it by Henry the Eighth, a jurisdiction asserted as recently as 1886. Till 1827 every Bachelor of Arts took an oath never to be reconciled to one Henricus Symeonis, a gentleman who in the thirteenth century killed an Oxford student, and every undergraduate swore never to hear or deliver lectures at Stamford. There is still an outdoor service at Magdalen on St. John's Day, a relic of the times of the peripatetic teacher. Up till 1830 at New College two choristers pro-



claimed that dinner was ready in mixed Latin and Norman-French.<sup>1</sup> Queen's still celebrates each Christmas the deliverance of her alumnus from the Shotover Boar, and once a century may be seen the spectacle of the respectable Warden and Fellows of All Souls hunting the roofs with lighted torches for an imaginary mallard. There is still the May morning Latin hymn on Magdalen Tower, and at the Sunday evening service in Christ Church a special verse is still sung after the anthem which dates from the residence of King Charles in the College. The list is endless, but similar survivals will be found in many parts of our ancient land. The true legacy of the past to Oxford is not in such incrustations, but in something deeper and more essential, something in the inner citadel of her soul.

A soul is a difficult thing to dogmatize about, and Oxford has at many times been unmindful of her traditions. But, as one surveys her long progress, it would seem that two principles were never altogether forgotten. The first was her duty to what we may call in the largest sense scholarship, the single-minded pursuit of learning for its own sake. Just as a philosopher's first service is to truth and not to popularity, so a university is pledged in the first instance to the quest of scholarship and not of utility. There is a sound instinct in the Cambridge toast—"God bless the higher mathematics, and may they never be of use to any one." It is the duty of the older universities to produce minds—to manufacture not ammunition wagons but guns to fire off ammunition. Their

<sup>1</sup> This pleasant fashion has been revived, I understand, at the annual Gaudy.

business is not with a narrow vocational training but with the humanities; they are guardians of the broad central culture of mankind. Matthew Arnold was right in claiming that Oxford has never sold her soul to the Philistines—who to-day, I take it, are represented by the “practical” man, who is so childishly unpractical, and the Chambers of Commerce, who demand a ready-money value in every study. Not hers the quest of the immediate advantage and the obvious end. She does not, and ought not, to provide the final technical training for any calling, and it will be an ill day for her if an ignorant clamour ever drives her to forget her prime duty and scatter her energies in competition with new specialized seminaries. Her task is to provide that stable foundation of mental and spiritual training on which alone specialism can be built.

If the first principle of her being is to some degree exclusive, the second is inclusive. She is a University for the whole English nation, and not a preserve of a class. It was only in the last century that the avenue of approach to her was made strait and narrow. Pre-Reformation Oxford was chiefly the home of poor men, and great figures like Robert Grosseteste and William of Wykeham and Thomas Wolsey sprang from the humblest stock. The statutes of her colleges gave the preference to such as were “honourable, good-living, peaceable, humble, and indigent,” and right on through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the boy from the village could make his way there if he had the will. He might be a humble sizar or servitor, but he had his chance, and names like those of Johnson and



## HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS

Whitefield, Isaac Newton, Bentley, Porson, and Whewell witness that the older Universities then offered a career to merit. It is curious to reflect that it was the Liberal reformers of the nineteenth century who closed this door, by laying the emphasis on an "efficiency" which was beyond the reach of the poor. There were honest men who objected to these changes, as there were honest men who objected to the First Reform Bill, on grounds which were neither stupid nor reactionary. About the 'eighties of last century Oxford had become a middle and upper-class preserve to an extent unknown in her past.

Just as the physical city is best seen from a hilltop which shows it in its proper setting, so the spiritual Oxford can only be truly understood when considered in regard to her setting—which is the people of England. The people of England have begun to awake to a sense of their heritage. Extra-mural teaching carried the ideal of Oxford into the industrial centres, and a body like the Workers' Educational Association made explicit a popular demand of which Oxford must be the final realization. Of these and kindred movements, the most hopeful, perhaps, of our day, Mr. Mansbridge has written eloquently and wisely. The latest Royal Commission has confirmed the old Universities in their spiritual autonomy, and strengthened them, we may believe, in their ancient ideal of a scholarship which obeys no other law than that of its own being; but in endowing them with State funds it has emphasized the fact that they are of right the possession of the whole nation. As to how the poor man may best enter upon his inheritance there may be many views,

but at any rate his title has been established. In this there is no revolution; indeed there is a reaction, a return to an old creed which had been forgotten. Mediæval Oxford owed her strength to the fact that her roots struck deep into the life of every parish and township in the land, and the Oxford of the future will win her power from the same source. She is not a sanctuary of gardens in which a privileged class may prolong for a little their happy youth; but, like Bunyan's House Beautiful, an inn "for the relief and security of pilgrims," to which all roads should lead, as they once led to Rome.



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XI

THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE



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## THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE<sup>1</sup>

YOU HAVE CONFERRED UPON ME A GREAT HONOUR, and my first word to you must be an expression of deep gratitude. "To be the Chancellor of a University," Macaulay has written in his *History of England*, "was a distinction eagerly sought by the magnates of the realm. To represent a University in Parliament was a favourite object of the ambition of statesmen. Nobles and even princes were proud to receive from a University the privilege of wearing the doctoral scarlet." I am not a magnate and I have no claim to be called a statesman, but all three of the honours mentioned I have received at your hands. You have elected to your highest office one who is not a member of this famous seat of learning, one who, though in his day a student of a Scottish University, omitted—I blush to confess it—to proceed to a degree. But you are the centre of light and learning in a great city, that city is the metropolis of Scotland, and I think I can claim that I am idiomatically Scottish in descent and spirit. It is our business as we go through life to discover new loyalties. I am proud to think that to-day I have acquired a cause to which I can give whole-hearted devotion and service.

I am going to offer you this morning a few reflections on the meaning of a university. More

<sup>1</sup> Chancellor's Installation Address delivered before the University of Edinburgh, July 20, 1938.



years ago than he cares to count, he who now addresses you had his first sight of a university when he went to Glasgow for the Bursary examination. It was one of those flaming sunsets which in autumn sometimes illumine Gilmorehill, and its towers and pinnacles silhouetted against the western sky seemed to me like the battlements of a celestial city. There was a castellated gateway, I remember, and I felt as I entered it like Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with, on my back, a heavy load of imperfections. Well, unlike Bunyan's Pilgrim, I did not lose that burden. I soon ceased to regard Glasgow or any university as a goal, an end in itself, and the culmination of a pilgrimage. I thought of it rather as the Wicket Gate where the journey began. But I have come to think that an inept comparison. A university is not a mere wicket gate which, once passed, is no more thought of; it is something which should influence every stage of our life. So, adopting Bunyan's language, I think of it as the Interpreter's House where we receive our viaticum for the road.

## I

A university has two plain duties. It has to transmit knowledge, and it has to advance knowledge. It has to transmit knowledge; that is to say it has to train the student's mind, and also to provide him with the special equipment which will enable him to earn a living; it has to give him as a basis a liberal education, and to add to that a professional technique. Both purposes require

## THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE

equal emphasis. A modicum of general culture will be of little value to a young man if he is going to starve. On the other hand, if we have only what has been called the "service-station" conception of a university we may have men entering a profession without having been taught to think, without possessing anything worth the name of mind. Our purpose is to combine humanism with technique.

By humanism I mean the study of man in all his relations, as thinker, as artist, as social and moral being; and by technique I mean the study of what might be called brute fact. Humanism is primarily a question of values. The object of humane studies is the understanding of human nature, the broadening of human interests and the better appreciation of the purpose of human life. Technique raises none of these questions. It is the mastery of brute fact for a definitely utilitarian end. Its concern is with material things and not with those of the spirit.

Now I believe that all true education requires a humane foundation. By humane learning I mean simply the disinterested pursuit of truth for its own sake, apart from any incidental advantages. The humanities should be broadly defined. They are not only art, literature, history, philosophy and religion; they are each and every science provided it is pursued in a certain way. There is a famous Cambridge toast that I have always liked: "God bless the higher mathematics and may they never be of use to anyone." It is not the subject matter which makes the distinction, for you can give humane value to any subject if you have the right attitude of mind.



## HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS

The instruction of a university must be in the general principles, the fundamental propositions, the theory, of any discipline. It cannot profess to teach the practice of a profession, for it cannot keep step with its rapid changes. Therefore even on the side of technique the element of humanism should enter. If a technical training is regarded not merely as the acquisition of a certain number of rules of thumb but as a piece of serious mental discipline, then you are introducing the spirit of the humanities into the vocational side. You are producing not only technicians but men and women with minds. That is a point, you will remember, on which the Greek philosophers always insisted. One is inclined to think that the views of Aristotle and Plato on education were highly unpractical—the sort of thing which would be well enough in a small leisured city, but which is meaningless in the crowded world of to-day. You remember that they were always condemning the occupations which they called mechanical, and which we honour to-day under the names of commercial and technical. Yes; but there is a passage in Aristotle's *Politics* in which he seems to me to talk excellent good sense. It is the object, he says, which a man sets before him in his study which makes the difference. If he does or learns anything for its own sake, or with a view to the development of his mind and character, then that pursuit, whatever its subject, will be a liberal education.

I have given you a rough definition of the educational purpose of a university. But there is the other not less vital aspect of its work, the protection and the advancement of knowledge. We

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must regard it not only as a seminary for the training of youth, but as a museum for record, a laboratory for discovery, a power-house for inspiration. The two duties are closely united, for unless they have a centre of creative thought behind them the various professions for which we train our youth will become stagnant and blind.

So one should regard, I think, as a primary function of a university the trusteeship of humane learning, the guardianship of the central culture of mankind. Its task is to pursue truth by research, by experiment and by speculation, and in so doing to inspire its members, young and old, with the love of truth, which includes the love of beauty, and with that spirit of disinterested inquiry which means intellectual freedom. In this work it will do far more than instruct in the narrow sense, for it will enable youth to instruct itself—in the words of a famous Cambridge scholar, “to seek out themselves, and to seek with an exacting conscience.” Without this high and serious purpose a university is only sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. This was the task of the academies of Greece amid the dynastic wars of the ancient world. It was the task of the universities of Europe in the Dark Ages when learning was a series of pin-pricks of light, zealously tended in the gloom and confusion. It has been the task of modern universities to keep the flame pure when an era of progress has kindled so many murky fires. It is our task especially to-day, when obscurity threatens many of the lights we cherish. To change the metaphor, a university is like one of our Border castles that stood on the highway from England. The duty of such a castle was not



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only to safeguard its adjacent territory but to hold the pass against invasion and from its battlements to flash a warning far afield.

### II

You will, I hope, forgive these platitudes. They are a necessary prologue to my argument, but they are only a formal statement of a university's purpose. For behind them lies the intimate and most human duty of starting youth on its career. We are not dealing with inanimate counters, but with living, breathing human beings on whom the future of the nation depends. We must give them the elements of a liberal education, we must give them the rudiments of a professional technique, we must enlist their services in the pursuit of truth and the safeguarding of knowledge. We must adapt them and adapt ourselves to the circumstances of a most difficult world, a world where, as it seems to many, the foundations are crumbling. What have we to say to the youth of to-day?

Let me first of all suggest to you what I think we cannot say. We cannot ask them to retrace their steps. There is a movement in America at present which I have been watching with deep interest, a movement not without parallels in the Old World. It is partly due to what I think is the acknowledged failure of the practice of giving students too wide a choice in the contents of a curriculum. Under that practice a young man was permitted to make his own selection from a huge variety of subjects; the result was that his training tended to be in snippets, which collec-

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tively did not represent a true intellectual discipline. The intention was honest, for it was designed to bring a flavour of the practical into all his studies, but this slender utilitarian interest did not dignify topics which had intrinsically small educational worth. The movement is also partly due to the recent revival of interest in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, a revival for which I have only praise, and in which I am glad to think that Canada is taking a leading part.

What is the gospel of these modern Thomists? The present system, they say, is chaos, and we must bring out of it a cosmos. The first business of education is to build up a mind, and that can only be done by a rigorous and systematic training. Therefore we must go back to the custom of our forefathers, who based all learning on the study of philosophy. In the University of Salerno, the chief medical school in the Europe of the Middle Ages, before beginning his medical course a student had to spend three years in the study of logic and metaphysics. We must return to the teaching of philosophy as our basis, and whatever system of philosophy we choose it must be a complete system, an absolute system, a system of first principles.

Now I confess that, while I have every sympathy with the purpose of these reformers, I am very doubtful about their method. Beyond doubt a strict education in a closed system of thought—for example, the scholastic logic which used to be part of our Scottish curriculum—is a far better training for the mind than to permit it to wander among snippets of knowledge. But is it the best? Is it indeed a possible one to-day? One difficulty



is as to which of the older philosophical systems should be chosen. A greater difficulty is how you would link it up with the multitudinous intellectual activities of the modern world, the study of the physical universe and of the infinite ramifications of human society. Would it not tend to become a mere riveted chain of dogmas, barren, in Bacon's famous words, like a virgin consecrated to God? It was very well in earlier days to make a theology or a metaphysic the foundation of all study, but that was possible because these were universally accepted creeds already interwoven with men's thoughts and dreams, and not adopted coldly as educational method. To return to them would be to treat an intermediate stage in human thought as the final stage. It would give us order, no doubt, but would it not be a dead and empty order? I remember a pregnant saying of Professor Whitehead's: "A self-satisfied rationalism is in effect a form of anti-rationalism. It means an arbitrary halt at a particular set of abstractions."

I have said that I sympathize with the purpose of these modern Thomists, and I think I understand their motive. They hunger, as we all hunger, for a greater security. They envy the Middle Ages their well-defined forms of thought and their well-rounded cosmogony. It is a desire which must always come upon a people in a time of violent change. It came upon the Greeks when their confidence was shaken. . . . But it is apt to have calamitous consequences. In Athens it led to the death of Socrates. . . . To select arbitrarily a set of first principles, and to make all our studies subordinate to them, is in effect to establish an intellectual dictatorship and to kill the freedom of

the mind. It is true that it would give us orderliness, but it would be the orderliness of death.

To-day, when there is so much anarchy abroad, the spirit of man, which detests anarchy, is willing to pay a high price for the return of law. We have seen great nations for this reason surrender their ancient liberties to a man or a machine. But too high a price can be paid for order. If we have in our intellectual world to-day much confusion, we have also a rich promise. "Where no oxen are the crib is clean, but much increase is by the strength of the ox." I would suggest what seems to me to be a wiser attitude. It is not a chain of dogmas to which we should return, but an insistence upon the liberty and sacrosanctity of the mind. We are plagued to-day by an epidemic of anti-rationalism. The human reason is not a perfect thing, but it is the best we have, and it is our duty to reverence it and give it free play. It is anti-rationalism to find a mystical virtue in half-baked "ideologies"—if I may use a new piece of jargon; it is anti-rationalism—"escapism," to employ the same jargon—to fly for shelter to an old building of our forefathers which is remote from the true arena of conflict. Two things we must zealously defend, the freedom and the integrity of our thought, boldly facing new conditions, ready to meet any problem, shirking no difficulty, but rigid in our fidelity to the laws which govern our intellectual being. Only thus shall we find confusion give place to order, and it will be the order of a harvest-field and not of a graveyard.



## III

I come back to what must dominate all our purposes—our human material, our youth. If we can give them minds accustomed to think and inspired with a reverence for thought, and at the same time give them the perspective created by some understanding of our long human story, then we have endowed them with what is most needed—confidence and hope. I hear to-day from many quarters foolish jeremiads about the younger generation; jeremiads which are not deep calling to deep, but shallow moaning to shallow. We are told that they lack the enterprise, the stamina and the fortitude of their fathers. That I believe to be wholly untrue. I have always regarded my own undergraduate generation as vigorous and enterprising, but it seems to me that the present generation has a physical audacity which would have left us gasping. A few years ago I made a note of how some of my son's contemporaries were spending their Oxford long vacation, and I found the following: deck-hand in a Hull trawler in the White Sea; working at the Canadian harvest; purser in a South American liner; helping Welsh miners to cultivate the land; trading old rifles in the Arctic for walrus ivory. It is as though they felt that they were living in a hard and dangerous world, and were resolved that there should be no experience which they could not face.

And I think that they have a like intellectual boldness. They seem to me to feel their respon-

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sibility to the State more keenly than my own contemporaries, and they look on politics as a serious personal duty. Youth is prone to extremes, and it is small wonder that the causes which appeal to many are the new grandiose world-reconstructions. If youth were not interested in such creeds then it would no longer be young. Its inclination towards extremes is due, I think, not only to the rhetorical turn of youth, but to the fact that such causes demand sacrifices and an austere discipline. Moreover, they are clean-cut and confident, and, in the prevailing confusion, youth demands something firm on which it can lay hold. If the universities are to fulfil their duty and marry the forward-looking spirit to the wisdom of the past, they must be not less bold and positive and confident. Like the Scriptural householder, they must bring from their stores things new as well as things old.

But if the spirit of adventure is as alive to-day as ever, has it the same food to feed on? Since I was an undergraduate the globe is sadly shrunken. Forty years ago there was a big back-world of mystery waiting for the discoverer. The west of the North American continent was still largely unsettled. The maps of Central Asia and Central Africa were full of blank spaces. Lhasa was unvisited. The holy cities of Islam were forbidden places. Only the fringe of the Polar regions had been travelled in. . . . To-day we know all about Lhasa and Mecca and Medina. We have visited the North and the South Poles. The mystery mountain ranges have been explored, the Arctic giants of Alaska have been climbed, and the equatorial snows of the Mountains of the Moon.



## HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS

If we have not yet conquered Everest we have prospected all of it. The desert of Southern Arabia has been crossed, and the gorges of the Bramaputra have been traversed. There are no major geographical riddles left, and most of the unknown patches on the map are now well within the orbit of human knowledge and human enterprise.

That is true, but it is not the whole truth. If the great riddles have been solved there remains an infinity of lesser puzzles. Our business now is less discovery than development. Take the Canadian North. It is nearly a century and a half since Alexander Mackenzie reached the Arctic; it is nearly a century since the first surveys were made on the shores of the Polar Sea. To-day the work is still going on, it is still pioneering, but it is intensive and detailed. We are founding settlements and winning natural wealth inside the Arctic Circle, and giving to what was a mere geographical expression the apparatus of civilized life. There are still many physical frontiers in the world, border-lines beyond which lies the little known.

But, more important, there are the spiritual frontiers, the horizons of the mind. We are still frontiersmen in a true sense, for we are domiciled on the edge of mystery, and have to face novelties more startling than any which confronted the old pioneers. Our youth, living on a spiritual frontier, still needs all the audacity and fortitude of the pioneer. As I see it, there is ample room for the spirit of adventure and for the discipline behind it which makes adventure fruitful.

## IV

My word to-day is therefore less to the wise men who are responsible for the administration of this University—they know their business and their duties far better than I do—than to the young men who come to this Interpreter's House to be equipped for the journey. I can put it in one sentence. They have a more difficult task than their fathers, they are called to a severer test, a more momentous duty, but they have a greater opportunity to prove the virtue that is in them.

First for those who after their university course will enter one of the normal vocations—the Church, medicine, the law, industry or commerce. They will find the technique of their profession more elaborate than in their fathers' day; the Church has to confront a more critical world, medicine has a more intricate subject matter, the lawyer has to face a multitude of novel problems, the business man has to operate a more complex machine. But I am concerned less with their professional difficulties than with the problems which, as educated and civilized men, they will have to face—the new duties of citizenship. The citizen of a nation like ours has to-day a peculiar responsibility. If he is true to the spirit of his university he has to help to maintain that delicate structure which we call civilization, in the face of a world which is full of destructive forces. In the last two centuries mankind has advanced far on the road to toleration, one of the first of the civic virtues; but now an intolerant spirit is abroad which claims for this or that dogma the status of



final truth, and would compel its acceptance by fire and sword. We are in danger of a return of the old wars of religion. Aristotle called man a "political animal"; there are too many to-day who would put the emphasis on the word "animal."

Again, the mechanism of the State has become most intricate, and at the same time it bulks far more largely in the life of the ordinary man. Therefore if a free polity is to succeed it must be as efficient as any authoritarian regime, and that means for all of us a greater measure of public spirit, a greater effort to subordinate private to public good, a quickened interest and a stronger intelligence in public affairs. It is easy to devise an authoritarian machine which will appear to be more effective than the patient methods of democracy. We have the task of proving that those short cuts are illusory, and that freedom does not mean ineptitude. We have to purge the defects and confirm the virtues of our democracy; we have to show that human nature is worthy of freedom. Such a task makes high demands upon patience and wisdom and good temper; it needs the best kind of courage, not the bravado of the swashbuckler, but the fortitude of the citizen. Our liberties, which we took for granted, have now become a cause to fight for; the truths, which once seemed platitudes, are now the oriflamme of a crusade. Could there be a nobler challenge to youth? My old friend F. S. Oliver, an alumnus of Edinburgh, has described the work of the statesman as an "endless adventure." The task to-day of every educated man may be called an endless adventure.

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In the second place, there are students who will give their lives not to a profession, but to the university's prime duty, the advancement of knowledge by some form of research. Scientific research to-day has reached a height undreamed of before, and has become not a hobby, or a luxury, but an imperious necessity. We are the slaves of our own successes. A congested population in certain areas which has to be fed from overseas; a higher standard of living; industries depending upon foreign supplies of raw material—these and a hundred other factors compel us to keep the scientific apparatus we have devised at the highest pitch of efficiency, and to be always extending and improving it. Again, our life has become elaborately specialized. A man is no longer master of several crafts, but of one only, and that involves an intricate system of co-operation, which must be invulnerable or the result is chaos.

What does this mean? That, just because our mechanism is so intricate, it is far more exposed to disaster than the simpler mechanism of earlier days. We can only preserve the standard which we have set ourselves by the constant exertion of intelligence. It means that scientists must be always on the watch to discover newer and better processes of production and distribution. It means that industry must be quick to make use of the results of such research and to adopt new methods.

To-day the work is widely ramified. It is undertaken by the intelligence departments of certain great industries. It is undertaken by the State, either directly or by grants of public money. I would instance in Britain the National Physical



Laboratory, the Biological Survey, the Medical Research Council, and the Agricultural Research Council, and in Canada the National Council of Scientific Research. These organizations are doing brilliant work. For example, there was a certain piece of electrical research recently completed in Britain at a cost of some eighty thousand pounds, the result of which has been the saving to the electrical industry of a million pounds per annum; and I could parallel this from Canadian experience. I believe that if a profit-and-loss account of these activities were made up on true lines it would be found that they were making many hundreds per cent for the nation on their capital outlay. I want to see the State extend its interests in this direction, for there is no more fruitful public service. But the task cannot be confined to the State and to private enterprise; it must be in a very special degree the work of the universities. It is a fulfilment of one of their principal duties, the advancement of knowledge.

Young men, I hope, will make this their life-work in increasing numbers, whether in the service of the universities, of industry, or of the State. I cannot imagine a more engrossing profession. In the first place, it has the highest purpose, the pursuit of truth, the unfettered exercise of the human reason. In the second place, it is a work of profound public importance, and the men and women who undertake it are in the fullest sense servants of the State. In the third place, it offers a life which can never be dull, for it is a life of perpetual adventure. You can never tell what small by-product of your inquiries may not turn out to be an epoch-making discovery. "The

## THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE

more thou searchest," to quote the inscription on the headquarters of the Research Council in Ottawa, "the more thou shalt marvel." There can be nothing narrow and stereotyped about a task which is a continuous fruitful groping into the unknown. A traveller often goes furthest when he is least certain of his goal. I remember a saying of Emeritus President Lowell of Harvard: "Columbus," he said, "when he set out did not know where he was going. When he arrived he did not know where he was. When he returned he did not know where he had been. But all the same he discovered America."

There is one branch of research which I should like to commend to your attention, research in that group of subjects which deal with social relations, and which, in a not very happy translation of the German *Sozialwissenschaft*, we call the "social sciences." Obvious research in these is very different from research in the physical world. The data are more confused, the chances of laboratory work are rarer. We have not the same power of making experiments and reaching the truth by trial and error. But, difficult as it is, research is possible on the same principles as in physical science, and I want to see more of it. At present we are inclined to attach high importance to these social studies, but we have not gone far in the development of a method. We laboriously and rather indiscriminately accumulate data on every kind of topic—population, crime, poverty, unemployment, the incidence of taxation, migration—there is no end to the list. But the data are apt to remain undigested, unrelated, and therefore meaningless. Shelley's words in his



*Defence of Poetry* are only too true. "We have more moral, political and historical wisdom," he says, "than we know how to reduce into practice. . . . Our calculations have outrun our conception; we have eaten more than we can digest." We have piled up the ore but we have still to smelt it. We need fewer collectors and more interpreters—men and women who will use their trained intelligence as well as their industry. I hope for good results from the new Nuffield College at Oxford, and from the body of workers which Lord Stamp has got together to be a kind of general staff for social studies. It is a field in which every university can do fruitful work.

## V

To produce minds, which are not ammunition dumps but guns to fire off ammunition; to give these minds a practical training for whatever vocation they choose, and a liberal background which will enable them to use the bequest of the past; to inspire our youth so that they may hail with enthusiasm the duties and the opportunities which await them—could a loftier task be entrusted to any human fraternity? Let me conclude these random observations in the fashion of our Scottish ancestors, with two appropriate prayers, for in these difficult days our reflections must usually end in prayer. The first is from Plato. There is a beautiful passage at the close of the *Phaedrus* when Socrates and Phaedrus, after discussing many things, turn homeward in the afternoon. But before they leave the grove by the Ilissus,

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Socrates observes that one should not leave the haunt of Pan without a prayer. And this is his prayer. "Oh, auspicious Pan, and ye other deities of this place, grant to me to become beautiful inwardly, and that all my outward goods may prosper my inner soul." The second is the words of Queen Elizabeth when, on her last visit, she looked back at Oxford from Shotover hill. "Farewell, farewell, dear Oxford! God bless thee and increase thy sons in number, in holiness, and in virtue."

With these kindred prayers, your Chancellor for the present takes his leave of this University.

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